

Cryptosporidiosis

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidium or “Crypto” for short, is a parasite that causes the diarrheal illness cryptosporidiosis. Cryptosporidiosis is one of the most common diseases spread through drinking or recreational water. The parasite is found in every region of the United States and throughout the world.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The major symptom of cryptosporidiosis is diarrhea. You may also experience stomach cramps and loss of appetite. Fever, fatigue, nausea, and vomiting are less common. Symptoms usually last about two weeks and may appear in cycles where a person may seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse, before the illness ends. Some people infected with Cryptosporidium have no symptoms but can still infect other people.

Are some people at risk for severe disease?

Although Cryptosporidium can infect all people, some groups are more likely to develop serious illness. Young children and pregnant women may be susceptible to dehydration resulting from diarrhea. Persons with weakened immune systems are also at risk for serious illness. Examples of persons with weakened immune systems include those with HIV/AIDS, cancer, and transplant patients who are taking medicine to suppress their immune system.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

Cryptosporidiosis is passed in the feces. People can be infected with Cryptosporidium by eating food, drinking water, or placing objects in their mouth that have touched feces from an infected person or animal. The organism can also be spread through recreational water such as swimming pools, hot tubs, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs or streams that have been in contact with sewage or feces.

How soon after infection do symptoms occur?

Symptoms usually start 2 to 10 days after becoming infected.

How long can an infected person spread the parasite?

Symptoms usually, last 1 to 2 weeks from start of infection but can last longer depending on the person.

Should people sick with cryptosporidiosis stay home from work, school, or day care?

If a person is employed as a food handler, works in a day care center, or has direct contact with ill persons or the elderly, they should not work until 24 hours after the diarrhea has stopped. Children with diarrhea should not attend a day care center until 24 hours after diarrhea has stopped.

What is the treatment for cryptosporidiosis?

Many people can recover from cryptosporidiosis on their own by drinking water and electrolytes. Nitazoxanide has been approved for treatment of diarrhea caused by Cryptosporidium in people with healthy immune systems as well. Talk to your healthcare provider before taking anti-diarrheal medications.

What can be done to prevent a cryptosporidiosis infection?

- Practice Good Hygiene Everywhere
- Help keep yourself and your loved ones healthy by washing your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not effective against Crypto.
- At Childcare Facilities
- Children who are sick with diarrhea should stay home until it stops. Clean, sanitize, or disinfect toys and surfaces to prevent germs from spreading easily. Wash hands regularly with soap and water to keep kids and caregivers healthy. Move adults with diarrhea to jobs that minimize opportunities for spreading Crypto (for example, to administrative work instead of food or drink preparation).
- At the pool, lake and other places we swim
- Do not swim or let kids swim if sick with diarrhea. If crypto is diagnosed, wait 2 weeks after diarrhea has stopped to go swimming. Do not swallow the water. Take young children on bathroom breaks or check their diapers every 60 minutes. Change diapers in a bathroom or diaper-changing area to keep germs and poop out of the water.
- Drinking water and Food
- If the safety of the drinking water is in doubt drink commercially bottled water or water that has been previously boiled for at least 1 minute and left to cool. At elevations above 6,500 feet (1,981 meters), boil for 3 minutes. Filters designed to remove Crypto are also okay. The label might read 'NSF 53' or 'NSF 58.' or "absolute pore size of 1 micron or smaller"
- Practicing safe sex
- Wait to have sex (vaginal, anal, and oral) for 2 weeks after you no longer have diarrhea. Patients typically stop having Crypto in their poop within 2 weeks after symptoms completely stop.