

Cryptosporidiosis (Crypto)

What is *Cryptosporidiosis*?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal illness caused by a parasite, *Cryptosporidium parvum*. The parasite lives in the intestines of humans and animals and is passed in the stool of an infected animal (especially cattle and sheep) or person. The parasite is able to survive outside of the body for a long time because it has an outer shell that protects it. This shell makes the parasite very resistant to chlorine disinfection.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of *Cryptosporidiosis*?

Some people who are infected with *Cryptosporidiosis* do not show any symptoms. Other people will have watery diarrhea lasting 1 to 2 weeks, stomach cramps, nausea, loss of appetite and vomiting especially in children.

How long after contact with *Cryptosporidiosis* will symptoms appear?

Symptoms will usually develop between one to 12 days (average seven days) after swallowing the parasite.

How long will symptoms last?

In healthy people, the illness will usually last one to two weeks. Symptoms may come and go within this time period. In people with weakened immune systems, infection can be chronic and life threatening.

How is *Cryptosporidiosis* Spread?

The most common way that *Cryptosporidium* is spread is through drinking water or recreational water. Infection happens after swallowing the parasite. It may also be found in soil, food or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from an infected human or animal. *Cryptosporidium* can be spread:

- By eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by the feces of people or animals that are infected with *Cryptosporidium*.
- By swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium* such as swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams that can be contaminated with sewage or feces from humans or animals. Note: *Cryptosporidium* is chlorine resistant and can live for days in pools.
- By eating uncooked and unwashed food contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*.
- By coming into contact with feces during sexual practices.

How is *Cryptosporidiosis* infection prevented?

- Always practice good hand hygiene using “The six steps to good hand washing” found at <http://healthunit.com/hand-washing>. Wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, before eating or making food, and after touching pets, farm or wild animals.
- Do not swim in recreational waters such as pools, hot tubs or Jacuzzi for at least two weeks from when diarrhea ends. The parasite is very resistant to chlorine and can live for days in chlorine-treated swimming pools and would then infect others who swam in the same water.
- Avoid drinking water from rivers, creeks, lakes, shallow wells, springs, ponds and streams.
- Only consume ice or drink treated water when traveling in countries where the water supply might be unsafe.
- Always wash vegetables and fruits with treated water before you eat them.
- Make sure all food that comes from animal sources is cooked well.
- Only drink pasteurized milk or milk products.
- When traveling, camping or hiking or if a “boil water” advisory has been issued bring the water to a boil for 1 full minute. This water should be used for drinking, brushing teeth, rinsing dentures or contact lenses, making ice cubes, washing uncooked fruits and vegetables, and in recipes requiring water. Dishes should be washed with water that has been boiled.
- The parasite is not killed with chemical disinfectants. If using a filter for drinking water, choose a filter that can remove particles 0.1-1.0 micrometers in diameter.
- Avoid sexual activity that involves anal contact.
- If you are sick with crypto and you:
 - work as a food handler or
 - are a healthcare worker or day care staffstay off of work until you are 24 hours symptom free in order to prevent spreading the illness to others.
- If your child has diarrhea caused by the parasite crypto, avoid sending your child to daycare until 24 hours after the last diarrhea.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to www.healthunit.com

References:

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