

Cryptosporidiosis (krip-toe-spo-rid-ee-oh-sis)

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease that is caused by microscopic parasites called *Cryptosporidium*. The most common *Cryptosporidium* species that cause infection are *Cryptosporidium hominis* and *Cryptosporidium parvum*. These parasites live in the intestines of humans and animals and are passed in the stool of an infected person or animal. The parasites are protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time and makes it very resistant to chlorine disinfection.

How cryptosporidiosis is spread?

Cryptosporidium may be found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals. *Cryptosporidium* can be spread:

- By putting something in your mouth or accidentally swallowing something that has come in contact with the stool of a person or animal infected with *Cryptosporidium*.
- By swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*. Recreational water in 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 food contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*.

Symptoms and recovery

People usually develop symptoms one to 12 days after ingesting the parasite. Infection in persons with normal immune systems include diarrhea, often accompanied by abdominal cramps, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and lowgrade fever. It is also possible to be infected with this parasite and not have any symptoms. Symptoms may come and go but usually resolve after 30 days. In persons with weakened immune systems, cryptosporidiosis can be chronic and life-threatening. If symptoms are prolonged, seek medical attention.

How to prevent cryptosporidiosis infection?

- Thorough hand washing is the best prevention. Wash hands after using the toilet, changing a diaper, and before handling or eating food.
- Avoid drinking water from rivers, creeks and lakes. If you are uncertain whether the water has been properly treated (such as foreign travel) do not drink it.
- Avoid food that might be contaminated. Wash with uncontaminated water and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Do not drink unpasteurized 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 one 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.
- Avoid sex that involves anal contact.