



## CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

### What is CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS?

Cryptosporidiosis (krip-toe-spo-rid-e-o-sis) is a diarrheal illness caused by a microscopic parasite, *Cryptosporidium parvum*. The disease is often called “crypto”. Crypto is found throughout the United States and world. It is one of the most common causes of waterborne illness (recreational water and drinking water) in humans in the United States.

### How is this parasite spread?

The *Cryptosporidium* parasite passes in the feces of infected persons and animals. Infection occurs when a person accidentally swallows the parasite. Possible ways to be infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- Drinking water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*. Avoid drinking untreated and improperly filtered surface water.
- Swimming or playing in rivers, streams, springs, lakes, swimming pools, and water parks contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*.
- From infected persons who do not wash his/her hands properly after using the restroom or diapering.
- Handling animals or working in the soil.
- Eating uncooked food that is not washed after being in soil or water that contains *Cryptosporidium*.
- Exposure to sewage or waste.

### Who gets cryptosporidiosis?

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis but infection may be more common in children under two years old, persons who travel, work with animals or those in close personal contact with someone already infected. Persons with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of being infected after exposure to cryptosporidiosis. Those include people receiving cancer chemotherapy, kidney dialysis, steroid therapy, and people with HIV or Crohn's disease.

### What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The symptoms may appear from 1 to 12 days after exposure, but usually within 7 days. The most common symptom is large amounts of watery diarrhea. There may also be cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever, headache and loss of appetite. Persons with healthy immune systems usually have symptoms for one to two weeks. During this time, symptoms may come and go. Occasionally, cryptosporidiosis can cause an infection in the gall bladder or the lining of the lung, causing pneumonia. Persons with weak immune systems may have much more severe and long lasting illness. Some persons may not have any symptoms, but they can still pass the parasite to others.

### How do I know if I have cryptosporidiosis?

If you suspect you have cryptosporidiosis, you should see your healthcare provider who will ask you to submit stool samples to send to a laboratory for testing.

### How long can an infected person infect others?

Cryptosporidiosis can be very contagious. The infected person can infect others when symptoms begin and for several weeks after the symptoms disappear. Infected persons who do not have symptoms can still infect others. Infected persons should wash their hands frequently with soap and water (especially after using the toilet, after changing diapers, and before eating and preparing food). Infected persons should avoid swimming in pools, using hot tubs and going to water parks. They should also avoid close contact with anyone who has a weakened immune system.

### How is cryptosporidiosis treated?

Most people with healthy immune systems generally recover without treatment. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids. There is a prescription medicine available that is approved for treatment of diarrhea caused by *Cryptosporidium*, but not recommended for the immunosuppressed. Cryptosporidiosis can be very serious and even cause death in persons with weakened immune systems. Persons with a weakened immune system should call their physician if they suspect they have cryptosporidiosis.