



Cryptosporidiosis

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by microscopic *Cryptosporidium* parasites. Once an animal or person is infected, the parasite lives in the intestines and passes in the stool. The parasite is protected by an outer shell, which allows it to survive outside the body and makes it resistant to chlorine-based disinfectants. Both the disease and parasite are called “Crypto.”

During the past 20 years, Crypto has become one of the most common causes of waterborne disease in humans in the United States. The parasites may be found in drinking and recreational water throughout the world.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

Crypto lives in the intestines of infected humans or animals. Millions are released in a bowel movement. That is the reason Crypto is found in soil, food, water or surfaces that have been contaminated with infected human or animal feces. When a person swallows the parasites, he becomes infected. You **cannot** become infected through contact with blood, but can by:

- Accidentally putting something in your mouth or swallowing something that has come in contact with feces from an infected person or animal.
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with Crypto (recreational water includes: swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds or streams contaminated with sewage or feces from humans or animals). **Note:** Crypto can survive for days in swimming pools with adequate chlorine levels.
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with Crypto.
- Accidentally swallowing Crypto picked up from surfaces (such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, toys) contaminated with feces.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom is watery diarrhea. Other symptoms include:

- Dehydration
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Weight Loss
- Fever

Some people will have no symptoms at all. Symptoms generally begin two to ten days (average seven days) after becoming infected with the parasites. In healthy people, the symptoms usually last about one to two weeks. Symptoms may go in cycles during which the person may seem better for a few days, then worse again before the illness ends. In people with weakened immune systems, the risk is more severe and could be life-threatening.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider may ask you to submit stool samples over several days. Testing for Crypto can be difficult and may require several samples to test for the parasites.

How is it treated?

People with healthy immune systems usually recover without treatment. If you have diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Antidiarrheal medications may slow the diarrhea, but talk to your health care provider before taking any medications or giving these medicines to children.

People in poor health or with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for more severe and prolonged illness. These people should check with their health care provider about over the counter or prescription medications that may help.

How is it prevented?

Practice good hygiene:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet, after every diaper change and before handling or eating food.
- Do not swim if you are experiencing diarrhea (or allow children with diarrhea to swim).

Avoid water that might be contaminated:

- Do not swallow recreational water.
- Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, springs, ponds or streams.
- Do not drink untreated water during community-wide disease outbreaks caused by contaminated drinking water.
- Do not use untreated ice or drinking water when traveling to countries with possibly unsafe water supply.

If you are unable to avoid using possibly contaminated water, you can make the water safe by heating the water to a rolling boil for one minute or by using a filter that has an absolute pore size of at least one micron or one that has been National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) rated for “cyst removal.”

Do not rely on chemicals to disinfect water. *Cryptosporidium* has a thick outer shell that is highly resistant to chlorine and iodine.

Avoid food that might be contaminated:

- Wash all raw vegetables and fruit with safe, drinkable water before eating.
- Wash or peel all raw vegetables before eating.
- Avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling to countries without water treatment or sanitation systems.

Take extra care when traveling:

- Avoid purchasing food and drinks from street vendors.
- Cooked hot foods, fruits you peel yourself, bottled and canned processed drinks, hot coffee or hot tea are probably safe.
- Talk to your health care provider about other guidelines specific to the area where you are going.

How does it affect my family?

Every family member should practice good hygiene and handwashing to prevent the spread of Cryptosporidiosis. Special caution should be taken not to swallow recreational water and to drink or use water strictly from non-contaminated sources.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services at (336) 641-7777 or visit our website at www.myguilford.com or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov