

Cryptosporidiosis FACTSHEET

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What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis, frequently referred to as “Crypto”, is a diarrheal disease caused by a parasite. It can live in the intestine of humans and animals. Cryptosporidium has become one of the most common causes of diarrhea spread by contaminated water in the United States.

Who gets Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis can occur at any age. It is a common cause of diarrhea in children; especially those in child care settings. Individuals who are immunocompromised are at risk for more severe disease.

What are the symptoms of Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis symptoms include diarrhea, loose or watery stool, nausea or vomiting, stomach cramps, and a slight fever. Some people have no symptoms.

How is Cryptosporidiosis spread?

The parasite that causes Cryptosporidiosis lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. The parasite is spread by accidentally swallowing it. This parasite can be found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have become contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals. The most common ways of Cryptosporidiosis spread are:

- Putting something in your mouth or accidentally swallowing something that has come in contact with the stool/feces of a person or animal infected with the parasite.
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with the parasite. Recreational water is water found in swimming pools, hot tubs, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams. Because chlorine does not kill this parasite it can live in swimming pools for days.
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with the parasite.
- Accidentally swallowing the parasite picked up from surfaces such as toys, bathroom fixtures, diaper pails, changing tables, contaminated with the stool of an infected person.
- Fecal (stool) exposure during sexual activity

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms generally appear two to twelve days after being infected.

Is a person with Cryptosporidiosis contagious?

Yes, a person with Cryptosporidiosis is contagious. The infection can be spread from the time the infected person first has symptoms until several weeks after the symptoms resolve.

Should a person with Cryptosporidiosis be excluded from work or school?

Since the organism is passed in the feces, only people with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel movements (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals, etc.) should be excluded from work or school. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after each visit to the toilet.

Can Cryptosporidiosis be prevented?

Cryptosporidiosis can be prevented by doing the following:

- Practice good hand hygiene
- Avoid water that might be contaminated (drinking and recreational)
- Avoid food that might be contaminated
- Avoid fecal (stool) exposure during sex

Want more information?

Information about Cryptosporidiosis and other related health care topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-9371.

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