

Cryptosporidiosis

Fact Sheet

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrhea illness in humans caused by the microscopic parasite *cryptosporidium hominis* or *cryptosporidium parvum*.

This parasite lives in the intestine of humans and animals and is passed in infected stool. Both the disease and the parasite are commonly referred to as “Crypto”. This parasite is 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.

The disease occurs worldwide and outbreaks have been associated with unfiltered drinking water supplies, swimming pools, unpasteurized apple cider, splash pads, and person-to-person spread.

What are the symptoms?

Usually the symptoms start after drinking infected water, and present from two to ten days after exposure. The symptoms may include watery diarrhea, cramps, nausea, vomiting, a mild fever and tiredness. These symptoms may last two to four weeks. The illness may last longer in people whose immune system is not working properly, such as cancer patients, and their symptoms may be more severe.

How is it spread?

Eating or drinking contaminated food or water is the most common way to become ill. The parasite eggs are passed in the stool of infected humans or animals and ingested.

It can be spread by:

- Directly putting something in your mouth or swallowing something that has come in contact with the stool of an infected person or animal.
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with cryptosporidium. Recreational water is swimming pools, hot tubs, splash pads, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams that can be infected with sewage or stool from humans or animals. The parasite is chlorine resistant and lives for days in pools.
- Eating uncooked or undercooked food infected with the parasite.

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How can I protect myself?

- 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 directly from rivers, creeks, springs or lakes. If you are traveling out of country and unsure if the water supply is treated, use bottled water or water that has been boiled for one minute (three minutes at high altitudes).
- Avoid food that might be contaminated. Wash with a safe water supply and peel or cook all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- The parasite is so small that only water filters that remove particles smaller than one micron are effective.
- Avoid preparing or handling food if ill with diarrhea.

If you become ill and are not better within 48 hours, get medical attention.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349.

Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Heymann D.L. (2008). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual* (19th Ed.) Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
- Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors, Cryptosporidiosis.
- Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health, Cryptosporidiosis, July 2006.

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