

Cryptosporidiosis (Crypto)

What is Cryptosporidiosis (Crypto)?

Cryptosporidiosis (also known as crypto) is a disease caused by a parasite that causes diarrhea. It can live in the intestines of people or animals and can be passed in the stool of an infected person or animal through contaminated food or water.

Crypto has become one of the most common causes of waterborne disease among people in the U.S. People can get sick when they drink or play in infected water or eat food grown in soil infected with the parasite.

Who Usually Gets Cryptosporidiosis?

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis. Young children and pregnant women are more at risk of becoming dehydrated from the diarrhea and should drink lots of liquids while ill.

People who are at most risk for serious illness from cryptosporidiosis are those who have weakened immune systems. Symptoms can be more severe and could lead to a serious or life-threatening illness.

People at risk include those who:

- have HIV/AIDS
- are being treated for cancer with certain medicines
- are recovering from transplants and taking certain medicines
- have inherited diseases that affect their immune systems.

How is Cryptosporidiosis Spread?

You can become infected after swallowing the parasite by having contact with food, water or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces (stools) from infected people or animals. Crypto is not spread by contact with blood.

Crypto can be spread by:

- swallowing water from pools, hot tubs, Jacuzzis®, fountains, rivers, lakes, springs, ponds or streams contaminated with sewage or stools from people and animals (Chlorine in pools does not kill crypto.)
- eating uncooked food or drinking unpasteurized or raw apple cider or milk contaminated with crypto (Wash all raw fruits and vegetables well with clean water before eating.)
- touching your mouth with your hand after being contaminated (soiled) by crypto picked up from surfaces (toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails) contaminated with stool from an infected person or animal.

What are the Symptoms of Cryptosporidiosis?

Symptoms include:

- diarrhea (loose or watery stools)
- stomach cramps
- upset stomach
- nausea (feel like throwing up)

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- vomiting (throwing up)
- dehydration
- fever
- weight loss.

Some people have no symptoms. Symptoms usually begin 2 to 10 days after being infected and last 1 to 2 weeks.

The symptoms may go in cycles. This means you seem to get better in a few days then feel worse before the illness ends.

People with weakened immune systems can develop more serious illness that can last longer and sometimes cause death.

How is Cryptosporidiosis Found?

Your health care provider will need a stool sample to see if you are infected. Testing for crypto can be difficult so you may need to give several stool samples over several days.

How is Cryptosporidiosis Treated?

- ☐ If you have a healthy immune system, you will recover on your own.
 - Drink lots of liquids to prevent dehydration. Do not drink alcohol and caffeine (tea, coffee, energy drinks and soda).
 - Eat healthful foods to help you get stronger.
 - Talk with your health care provider about an anti-parasite medicine (nitazoxanide) that has been approved by the U.S. Federal Drug Administration as a treatment for crypto.
- ☐ If you have a weakened immune system, talk with your health care provider about your treatment options.
 - Talk with your health care provider about how to treat a baby or young child. A quick loss of fluids from diarrhea can be life-threatening in babies.
 - Anti-diarrheal medicines may work. Your health care provider can tell you if these are right for you or your child.

How can You Prevent the Spread of the Cryptosporidiosis?

- Wash your hands well with soap and water:
 - after using the toilet
 - before handling or eating food (especially if you have diarrhea)
 - after every diaper change (even if you are wearing gloves).

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not kill crypto.
- Do not go swimming if you or your children have diarrhea. Take young children on bathroom breaks every 60 minutes or check diapers every 30 to 60 minutes when you are at the pool.
- Do not swallow water that other people are in (pools, hot tubs, Jacuzzis®, fountains, rivers, lakes, springs, ponds or streams).
- Avoid drinking untreated water from shallow wells, rivers, springs, ponds and streams.
- Avoid drinking untreated water during community-wide outbreaks of disease caused by contaminated drinking water.
- Avoid using ice or drinking untreated water when traveling in countries where the water supply may be unsafe.
- Wash or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Use uncontaminated water to wash all food that is to be eaten raw.
- Avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling in countries that have minimal water treatment and sanitation systems.
- Avoid exposure with stools or the rectum during sex by using condoms.
- Avoid contact with farm animals if you have a weakened immune system.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.