

Cryptosporidiosis - Factsheet

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a disease caused by a protozoan organism called *cryptosporidium*.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

Illness usually begins about 2 to 14 days after being exposed to the organism. Symptoms include watery diarrhea and stomach cramping. Some people vomit and have a low-grade fever. Symptoms may come and go and last for about two weeks, but sometimes continue for up to a month.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

Persons or animals become infected by swallowing the organism. This may happen when a person or animal drinks water or eats food “dirtied” or contaminated with infected stool (feces) material. *Cryptosporidium* may also be spread if a person touches objects contaminated with the stool and gets the organism on their hands. Their unwashed hands can then transfer the organisms to their mouth. Some people have become sick after swimming in public pools contaminated with stools from infected persons.

How long are people contagious?

In most cases, stools no longer contain the organism after two weeks.

Who gets cryptosporidiosis?

Anyone, but it may be more common in persons with weakened immune systems.

What treatment is available for people with cryptosporidiosis?

Treatment with a drug called nitazoxanide (Alinia®) is available for people over one year of age that have a healthy immune system. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids. People with weakened immune systems should see their doctor.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

Since *cryptosporidium* is passed in the stool, children and staff in daycare centers, health care workers, or people who handle food should not go to school or work while they have diarrhea. After diarrhea ends, people may return to work or school and they should continue to observe hand washing practices.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting cryptosporidiosis?

You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with *cryptosporidium* with these practices:

- Wash hands frequently with water and soap, and especially after using the toilet, changing a diaper, caring for someone who is ill with diarrhea, handling an animal or its waste, and before preparing and/or eating meals.
- Promptly clean contaminated surfaces with 3% hydrogen peroxide.

- Carefully dispose of sewage wastes so as not to contaminate surface or groundwater.
- Avoid food or water from sources that may be contaminated.
- Avoid accidentally swallowing water from lakes, rivers or swimming pools.