

CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS



FACT SHEET

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by microscopic parasites, *Cryptosporidium*, that can live in the intestine of humans and animals. The 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-based disinfectants. During the past 2 decades, “Crypto” has become recognized as one of the most common causes of waterborne disease in humans in the United States.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Your health care provider may ask you to submit stool samples to see if you are infected. Tests for Crypto are not routinely done in most laboratories. Therefore, your health care provider should specifically request testing for the parasite.

Most people who have healthy immune systems will recover without treatment. Diarrhea can be managed by drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Nitazoxanide has been FDA-approved for treatment of diarrhea caused by *Cryptosporidium* in people with healthy immune systems and is available by prescription.

Consult with your health care provider for more information.

How Do People Get Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidium lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. An infected person or animal sheds Crypto parasites in the stool. You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite.

Cryptosporidium may be found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals. The parasite is found in every region of the United States and throughout the world in both recreational and drinking water.

Symptoms of Cryptosporidiosis

The most common symptom of Cryptosporidiosis is watery diarrhea. Other symptoms include: stomach cramps or pain, dehydration, nausea, vomiting, fever, and weight loss. Some people with Crypto will have no symptoms at all. While the small intestine is the site most commonly affected, Crypto infections could possibly affect other areas of the digestive tract or the respiratory tract.

How Can I Help Prevent the Spread of Crypto?

The best way to prevent getting and spreading Cryptosporidiosis is to have good hygiene and sanitation, including washing hands carefully after going to the bathroom or contacting stool, and before eating. People should avoid contact with animal feces. They should also avoid possibly contaminated food and water.

People who have Cryptosporidiosis should not swim in communal areas because *Cryptosporidium* can reside in the anal and genital areas and therefore be washed off. They should wait until at least two weeks after diarrhea stops before entering public water sources since the parasite can still be shed for a while.

For more information, contact a Public Health Nurse at the City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or visit www.cchdmt.org or www.cdc.gov