

Cryptosporidium

What is *Cryptosporidium*?

Cryptosporidium is a parasite that causes an illness called cryptosporidiosis. This illness affects the stomach and intestines.

How do I get cryptosporidiosis?

You must ingest (swallow or eat) the *Cryptosporidium* parasite to become infected. Cryptosporidiosis is usually spread through the following:

- *Cryptosporidium* parasites can be found in surface waters (lakes, streams, etc.) and recreational swimming pools. Drinking from or swallowing water while playing in these waters can cause you to become sick. *Cryptosporidium* can be spread in a chlorinated swimming pool because the parasite is resistant to chlorine.
- People who become infected with *Cryptosporidium* will have the parasite in their feces (stools). If people do not properly wash their hands after using the restroom or changing diapers, and then handle food that others will eat or objects that others will put in their mouths (e.g., toys), they can spread the parasite to other people.
- Cattle and other domesticated animals can also be infected and can spread the parasite to you through their feces.
- Cryptosporidiosis is **NOT** spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, sharing drinks, hugging or kissing.

Symptoms

Symptoms begin 2-10 days (usually 7 days) after ingesting the *Cryptosporidium* parasite. Symptoms may come and go periodically for a few weeks. Symptoms include:

- Frequent diarrhea (often watery) – can lead to severe dehydration
- Stomach cramping and pain
- Some people may experience fever, nausea and vomiting.
- People with severely weakened immune systems (especially AIDS patients) may not be able to get rid of the parasite, and symptoms can become life threatening.

Prevention

- Never drink water from lakes, streams, etc. unless you have boiled (for one minute) or filtered it first. The parasite is very small and not all filters will remove the parasite. Select a water filter that will remove *Cryptosporidium*.
- Do not swallow recreational water from swimming pools or spas.
- Wash your hands before preparing or eating food or handling baby toys.
- Always wash your hands after using the restroom. You may have and spread the parasite even if you do not have any symptoms.
- Always wash your hands and the child's hands after diapering, helping with toilet training, and caring for a sick child. (See back for more details on disinfection.)



Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.

(continued on back)



Tri-County Health
Department

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Cryptosporidium (continued)

Cleaning and Disinfection

Cryptosporidium is resistant to chlorine (which is used in bleach-based household disinfectants) but can be killed by boiling water and by using hydrogen peroxide. Without cleaning, the parasite can survive for weeks on surfaces in your home (e.g., countertops, toys), especially in a moist environment. To avoid spreading the disease to other people in your house, follow these recommendations for cleaning and disinfecting:

- Spray surfaces with 3% hydrogen peroxide (available at local drug stores; do not need to dilute). Allow surfaces to air dry completely without wiping them off. **Note:** bleach-based products will not kill the parasite.
- Submerge objects in boiling water for 1 minute or 3% hydrogen peroxide for 10 minutes.

Treatment for cryptosporidiosis

It is important to drink lots of fluids to avoid dehydration. Symptoms typically last 1-3 weeks. Most people with a healthy immune system will recover on their own. If symptoms persist or are severe, contact your health care provider. There is a new treatment available for cryptosporidiosis, contact your health care provider about this.

If you think you have cryptosporidiosis:

- Do not prepare food for others. If you must prepare food for your family, wash your hands thoroughly and disinfect all surfaces as described above.
 - If your job involves handling food or caring for small children, do not go to work and contact your health care provider.
 - Children who might have cryptosporidiosis should not go to child care settings – especially if they have diarrhea.
 - Children and adults with diarrhea should not swim for 2 weeks after their diarrhea stops. This is essential for children in diapers.
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