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## **Cryptosporidiosis**

### **What is cryptosporidiosis?**

Cryptosporidiosis is caused by a very small intestinal parasite, *Cryptosporidium*. It is a common cause of diarrhea worldwide and can be a severe problem for people with weak immune systems.

### **How do you get it?**

Cryptosporidiosis is spread by eating food or drinking water contaminated with stool from infected animals or humans. The disease can be spread person-to-person, animal-to-person, and by contaminated food. It is commonly spread through swimming pools. The eggs of the parasite can stay alive outside the body for 2 to 6 months in moist settings.

### **What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?**

The major symptoms are stomach cramping and watery diarrhea. Less commonly, nausea, vomiting, and mild fever may also occur.

### **When do the symptoms start?**

The symptoms usually start about 7 days after exposure to the parasite, but they can begin from 1 to 12 days after exposure.

### **What is the treatment for cryptosporidiosis?**

Most people with cryptosporidiosis can clear the infection on their own, but ensure the ill person drinks plenty fluids to replace what is lost from diarrhea. The illness usually passes in 3 to 7 days. In persons with healthy immune systems, the FDA has recently approved a drug called nitazoxanide for treatment.

The infection can be serious, even life threatening, when it occurs in persons whose immune systems are weakened by medical treatment or chronic disease such as cancer or HIV/AIDS.

### **Should a person with cryptosporidiosis stay home from school or work?**

Any child with diarrhea should stay home from day care until the diarrhea stops. Also, people with diarrhea who work in food-handling or take direct care of patients should stay home from work until they are well. Infected people with no symptoms who work as food handlers, child-care and health care workers, should get permission from their doctor or the Health Department before returning to work. A person with cryptosporidiosis may be able to spread the disease for several weeks after the symptoms have gone away. Therefore, careful hand washing is very important upon return to work or day care.

### **How can you keep from getting it?**

There is no vaccine to prevent cryptosporidiosis.

Wash your hands carefully after using the toilet, after changing diapers, after handling animals, and before eating or making food. After changing diapers, wash the child's hands.

Dispose of human and animal waste promptly and carefully.

Avoid drinking untreated water from ponds, lakes, streams, swimming pools, hot tubs or fountains. If you must drink untreated water, first bring it to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute.

*Cryptosporidium* can live for days in swimming pools even with good chlorine levels.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/>