



Cryptosporidium Fact Sheet

What is *Cryptosporidium*?

Cryptosporidium, often called simply “Crypto”, is a tiny parasite that can cause diarrheal disease. There are many different species of crypto: some species infect animals, and others people. Crypto is most commonly associated with contaminated water.

Who is at risk to get crypto infections?

Anyone can get infected with crypto, but the most commonly affected people include children who attend childcare centers, childcare workers, people taking care of others with crypto, and people exposed to contaminated water, such as swimmers or hikers who drink unfiltered water. Crypto can cause serious infections in people with severely weakened immune systems.

How is crypto spread?

Crypto lives in the guts of humans and animals, and is shed in the feces of infected individuals. A new person gets infected by ingesting the parasite, which could be in contaminated water, food, or on their hands if they have touched a contaminated surface. Crypto parasites have an outer shell that makes them resistant to chlorine, so they can survive even in chlorine-treated water like swimming pools.

What are the symptoms of crypto infection?

Crypto can cause watery diarrhea, stomach cramping, nausea, vomiting, dehydration, fever, and weight loss. Some people may have no symptoms. Symptoms typically last 1-2 weeks in people with healthy immune systems.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The average incubation period is 1 week, with a range of 2-10 days after becoming infected.

How is this disease diagnosed?

Lab tests are done on stool specimens to identify crypto. Because infected people don't always shed the parasite, it may take several stool samples from different days to catch the bug. Special tests are needed to identify crypto, so healthcare providers must specifically ask the lab to look for crypto.

What is the treatment for crypto infection?

Most people with crypto will get better without treatment. Drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration is recommended. There are drugs available to treat crypto: consult with a doctor.

What can be done to prevent the spread of this disease?

- WASH YOUR HANDS thoroughly after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or before preparing food. Wash your hands after contact with animals or their environments.
- Child care facilities should exclude children with diarrhea from attending until the diarrhea has stopped
- Don't swim in public swimming areas if you have diarrhea, and if you are diagnosed with Crypto avoid swimming for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea stops.
- Do not swallow water while swimming.
- Do not drink untreated water from natural water sources like lakes and rivers.