

# Cryptosporidiosis (*Cryptosporidium*)

## What is *Cryptosporidium*?

*Cryptosporidium* is a parasite that causes a diarrheal illness called cryptosporidiosis (the parasite and the disease are often called “Crypto”). Crypto is a common waterborne illness and is the most common cause of recreational water illness in the United States.

## How is it spread?

Crypto is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal. The parasite is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time, and is highly resistant to chlorine.

Crypto can be transmitted by:

- Swallowing contaminated water while swimming or drinking.
- Having contact with animals, especially calves and goats, and their environment.
- Having contact with people who are sick with Crypto, especially in child care settings.
- Swallowing Crypto oocysts picked up from contaminated surfaces, like changing tables, door handles, or toys.
- Drinking raw (unpasteurized) milk or cider.
- Eating foods contaminated with Crypto.
- Exposure to fecal material during sexual activity.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of Crypto usually include:

- Watery diarrhea
- Stomach cramps
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Slight fever
- Vomiting

Symptoms usually begin about 1 week (range, 2 days-2 weeks) after exposure to the parasite.

## How long does it last?

In healthy people, symptoms usually last about 2 weeks. The symptoms may go in cycles in which you seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse, before the illness ends. Most healthy people do not need any specific treatment and will recover on their own. Diarrhea should be managed by drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

## What can I do to minimize my risk of getting Crypto?

You can reduce your risk of getting Crypto by following these recommendations:

- Wash your hands often and with soap and water. Alcohol-based sanitizers are not effective against Crypto.
- Do not swallow water while swimming.

## CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS (CRYPTOSPORIDIUM)

- Wash your hands after contact with farm animals, pets, animal poop, and animal environments.
- Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams.
- Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or cider.
- Use caution when traveling in countries with minimal water treatment and sanitation systems by avoiding tap water, fountain drinks, ice, and raw foods.
- Reduce fecal-oral exposure during sexual activity and avoid sexual activity with those who have diarrhea or who have recovered from Crypto in the last 2 weeks.
- Do not bathe with others while sick and for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea stops.
- Do not attend or work in child care settings or preschool until 24 hours after diarrhea stops.
- Wait to have sex until 2 weeks following the end of symptoms.

To report a suspected waterborne or foodborne illness, call the Minnesota Department of Health at 1-877-366-3455 (or 651-201-5655 from the Twin Cities) or email [health.foodill@state.mn.us](mailto:health.foodill@state.mn.us).

## What should I do if I have symptoms?

Contact your healthcare provider if you have concerns about your health. They may ask you to submit a stool (poop) specimen to diagnosis the illness.

People who are infected with Crypto shed the parasite in their stool while they are having symptoms and for about 2 weeks after symptoms have stopped. People who have symptoms of Crypto can reduce their risk of spreading their illness to others by following these recommendations:

- Wash your hands carefully and frequently with soap and water.
- Stay out of pools, splash pads, and lakes while sick. If diagnosed with Crypto, do not swim for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea stops.

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