

# Cryptosporidiosis

## What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is an infection caused by a parasite called *Cryptosporidium*.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms usually include watery diarrhoea and abdominal pain. Fever, nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite may also occur.

Symptoms usually start from 1 to 12 days (average 7 days) after a person becomes infected. Symptoms may come and go and can last from days to weeks. Symptoms may be severe and longer lasting in people with weakened immune systems.

## How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

The *Cryptosporidium* parasite is found in the faeces of infected humans or animals.

People become unwell after swallowing the parasite. Infection can occur through:

- person-to-person contact, particularly from young children to other children or their carers;
- swallowing contaminated water from rivers, streams, springs, ponds, lakes, swimming pools, the sea, bores or wells;
- handling infected animals or their manure;
- sexual contact with the risk of faecal exposure;
- drinking untreated milk;
- eating undercooked food, fruit or vegetables that have been contaminated or washed with contaminated water.

While people are most infectious when they have diarrhoea, they can still pass the infection on to others for several weeks after their symptoms have resolved.

## What treatment is available?

Most people usually recover with rest and extra fluids. Medication is generally not recommended but may be prescribed by doctors in complicated cases.

## Who is at risk?

*Cryptosporidium* can infect anyone. However, those who are most likely to become infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- people in close contact with others who have cryptosporidiosis;
- children who attend childcare;
- parents of infected children;
- health care and childcare workers;
- swimmers who swallow even small amounts of recreational swimming water;
- people who drink untreated water;
- international travellers, particularly to or from developing areas;
- people who work with animals;
- men who have sex with men.

People with weakened immune systems are at risk for more serious disease and should see their doctor if symptoms develop.

## How is it prevented?

### Hand washing

Hand washing is a very effective way of preventing person to person spread of *Cryptosporidium*. Hands should be washed with soap and running water for between 10 to 15 seconds:

- after going to the toilet or changing nappies;
- after handling animals or their manure;
- after working in the garden;
- before preparing food or drinks;
- before eating.

### Nappy changing

Nappies should not be changed on tables or counters where food is prepared or eaten. Change areas should be cleaned with warm soapy water and disinfectant after every nappy change.

### Do not drink unpasteurised milk or untreated water

People should avoid drinking unpasteurised milk or untreated water (for example from rivers, creeks, lakes, or dams). If untreated water is the only available source, boiling water will kill *Cryptosporidium*. Avoid swimming in natural waters (e.g. rivers, creeks, dams, surf) within a week after heavy rain.

## Safe food handling

Make sure all foods are cooked thoroughly and wash or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.

## How is it controlled?

Children who have diarrhoea should be kept home from preschool, childcare or play group until 24 hours after the diarrhoea has completely stopped.

People who work in food preparation, childcare centres, aged care facilities, or health care facilities should not return to work until 48 hours after their diarrhoea has stopped.

People with cryptosporidiosis should not swim, wade, or paddle in swimming pools or recreational water facilities for at least two weeks after diarrhoea has stopped. Also, towels and linen should not be shared for at least two weeks after diarrhoea has stopped.

## Need more information?

For more information about cryptosporidiosis, contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on (02) 5124 9213.

*Communicable Disease Control Section at the Health Protection Service is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.*

*Cryptosporidiosis is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers.*

## Acknowledgement

1. Heymann DL, 2015, Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 20th edition.

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