

Cryptosporidiosis



What is cryptosporidiosis?

Did you know you could be at risk of contracting cryptosporidiosis when you go swimming? Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by the microscopic parasite *Cryptosporidium*. Both the parasite and the disease are commonly known as “Crypto.” The parasite is very resistant to chlorine because it is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time. Symptoms of cryptosporidiosis generally begin 2 to 10 days after infection with the parasite. The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis is watery diarrhea. Other symptoms include stomach cramps, dehydration, nausea, vomiting, fever, and weight loss. Some people may have no symptoms at all, but can still pass the disease to others.

How common is Crypto?

Every year, approximately 748,000 cases of Crypto occur in the United States. Crypto is one of the most frequent causes of waterborne disease in the United States. The parasite is found throughout the U.S. and the world. People who are at greater risk to contract Crypto include children who attend daycare, child care workers, caregivers of people who have Crypto, international travelers, and backpackers, hikers, and campers who drink unfiltered, untreated water. Crypto outbreaks can be massive. In 2007, Utah had an outbreak with 1,902 cases.

How do people get infected with this germ?

While this parasite can be spread in several

different ways, water (drinking water and recreational water) is the most common method of transmission. Crypto lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. Millions of Crypto parasites can be released in a bowel movement from an infected human or animal. You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite. Crypto can be spread by:

- Putting something in your mouth or accidentally swallowing something that has come in contact with the stool of a person or animal infected with Crypto
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with Crypto. Recreational water can be contaminated with sewage or feces from humans or animals.

- Swallowing drinking water or beverages contaminated by stool from infected humans or animals.
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with Crypto. All fruits and vegetables you plan to eat raw should be thoroughly washed with uncontaminated water.
- Touching your mouth with contaminated hands.

What can be done to prevent this disease?

Follow these easy tips to prevent Crypto:

- Wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds. Make sure to wash your hands after going to the bathroom, after changing diapers, before preparing or eating foods or beverages, and after handling an animal or animal waste.
- Do not swallow water from pools, spas, ponds, or lakes.
- Do not swim if you have diarrhea (this is essential for children in diapers). If diagnosed with cryptosporidiosis, do not swim for at least 2 weeks after the diarrhea stops.
- Shower before entering a pool or spa.
- Wash children thoroughly (especially their bottoms) with soap and water after they use the toilet or their diapers are changed and before they enter the pool.
- Change diapers in the bathroom, not at the poolside. Take children on frequent bathroom breaks and check their diapers often.
- Keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings. Daycare centers should not provide water play areas.
- Do not prepare food for others while ill with diarrhea.
- If you are traveling to a developing country, drink only treated or boiled water, and eat only cooked hot foods or fruits you peel yourself.

How is the infection diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask you to submit stool samples to see if you are infected.

Because detection of Crypto can be difficult, you may be asked to submit several stool specimens over

several days. Tests for Crypto are not routinely done in most laboratories. Therefore, your healthcare provider should specifically request testing for the parasite.

How can Crypto be treated?

Most people who have healthy immune systems will recover without treatment. Diarrhea can be managed by drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to dehydration resulting from diarrhea and should drink plenty of fluids while ill. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea may be especially life threatening to babies. Therefore, parents should talk to their healthcare providers about fluid replacement therapy options for infants. Anti-diarrheal medicine may help slow down diarrhea, but a healthcare provider should be consulted before such medicine is taken.

Are there long-term consequences?

Persons with diarrhea usually recover completely, although it may be several months before their bowel habits are entirely normal. However, for those with weakened immune systems and in people with AIDS, Crypto can be serious, long-lasting, and sometimes fatal. Prevention is key to avoiding this disease.

For more information, please contact:

County of San Bernardino
Department of Public Health
Communicable Disease Section
www.sbcounty.gov/dph/publichealth
(800) 722-4794

To report a possible waterborne illness, contact:

County of San Bernardino
Department of Public Health
Division of Environmental Health Services
(800) 442-2283

Source: this information was taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website
www.cdc.gov