

### **What is cryptosporidiosis?**

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal illness caused by a parasite which is found in the feces (stool) of infected animals or humans.

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

Symptoms include abdominal cramps, watery diarrhea, lack of appetite, nausea, vomiting and fever. Based on the severity of the symptoms weight loss and dehydration may occur.

Symptoms often come and go but usually last less than 30 days. It is also possible to be infected and not have any symptoms.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms usually appear 1-12 days after exposure. The average time is 5-8 days.

### **How is cryptosporidiosis spread?**

Cryptosporidiosis is often spread by the following routes of transmission:

- Consuming cross contaminated food or water that has come into contact with ill animals or an ill person who did not wash their hands well enough after going to the bathroom
- Contact with an animal or person ill with cryptosporidium (i.e. household, child care, farm, petting zoo contacts, etc)
- Drinking fecally contaminated or inadequately treated water:
  - drinking any lake or stream water presents a risk of swallowing cryptosporidium oocysts
  - swallowing public recreational water which may have become cross contaminated by an infected person or animal

Children under the age of two, animal handlers, travelers, men who have sex with men and close personal contacts of infected individuals (families, health care workers and child care workers) are particularly prone to infection. Outbreaks have been associated with child cares, consumption of beverages and recreational use of water including waterslides, swimming pools and lakes.

### **How long is a person infectious (contagious)?**

Persons ill are most contagious while they have symptoms, but can continue to be contagious for weeks after symptoms have stopped. Treatment with medication often shortens the length of time a person is infectious. Cryptosporidium cysts can continue to be infectious for 2-6 months or longer outside the body when in a moist environment.

### **How is cryptosporidiosis diagnosed and what is the treatment?**

Cryptosporidiosis is not easily diagnosed unless a stool test is used to look for the germ. Most people will recover from this illness without medication. The FDA has approved Nitazoxanide as a treatment option for children greater than 1 year old and adults. Immunosuppressed or HIV positive individuals should not take Nitazoxanide. It is important to drink plenty of fluids while ill to prevent dehydration. People who have a weakened immune system may have more severe symptoms and a longer length of illness.

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### How can I prevent a cryptosporidiosis infection?

1. Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and warm water before handling food and dishes. Wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing diapers. Wash hands thoroughly and frequently when gardening, or handling pets or farm animals, particularly young animals like calves. Always wash your hands after handling any waste.
2. Drink only treated water. When camping or backpacking, bring bottled water with you or boil untreated water (i.e. river) for 3 - 5 minutes at a rolling boil before using it (even for washing). Chemical disinfectants are not effective against cryptosporidiosis.
3. Take hygiene precautions when traveling in developing countries. Foods and drinks, in particular raw fruits and vegetables, tap water or ice made from tap water, unpasteurized milk or dairy products and items from street vendors may be contaminated.
4. Wash fruits and vegetables with safe water, especially if you plan to eat them raw. You can also peel fruit that you will not cook.
5. Avoid unpasteurized milk or dairy products and unpasteurized juices. Cooking kills this germ.
6. If you have diarrhea do not cook for others.
7. Wash your hands carefully if in contact with animals sick with diarrhea.
8. Do not swallow any water from lakes, rivers, pools or jacuzzis. Water swallowed accidentally while swimming may contain the germ. Do not swim in public pools or hot tubs if you have diarrhea or within 2 weeks of resolution of your diarrhea even if you were treated with a medication.

Cryptosporidiosis is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department. In Snohomish County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 425.339.5278, Monday-Friday, 8AM - 5PM.

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