

CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS (*Cryptosporidium*)

What is it?

Cryptosporidium is a parasite that causes a diarrheal illness called cryptosporidiosis (the disease and the parasite are often called "Crypto"). Crypto is one of the most common waterborne diseases in the United States and is frequently found in both drinking water and recreational water.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of Crypto include watery diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps, loss of appetite, weight loss, and a slight fever. Sometimes people infected with Crypto have no symptoms at all, but can still pass the parasite to others.

Symptoms usually begin about 1 week after being exposed to the parasite. The symptoms may go in cycles in which you may seem to get better for a few days, and then feel worse again before the illness ends.

How long does it last?

In healthy people, symptoms usually last about 2 weeks. Treatment for Crypto may be available from your health care provider.

How is it spread?

Crypto can be found in water, food, soil, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces of infected humans or animals. Crypto can survive outside the body and in the environment for long periods of time, even in swimming pools with adequate levels of chlorine. You can become infected with Crypto after accidentally swallowing the parasite.

People become infected with Crypto by:

- Swallowing water contaminated with Crypto.
- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their mouth or putting a contaminated object into their mouth.
- Not washing hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers and then eating foods.
- Eating food or drinking liquids contaminated with Crypto.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

- Contact your health care provider.
- Wash your hands often.
- Do not swim while you have diarrhea. If you are diagnosed with Crypto, you should not swim for 2 weeks after your diarrhea has stopped.

How can I prevent Crypto infections?

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds
 - ✓ After using the bathroom
 - ✓ After changing diapers
 - ✓ After touching animals
 - ✓ Before eating
- Wash your hands more often when someone in your household is sick.
- Don't drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, streams, ponds, or shallow wells.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces immediately after vomiting or diarrheal accidents.

Healthy Swimming Tips:

- Do not swallow water or get water in your mouth while swimming.
- Take a shower before and after swimming.
- Do not swim when you have diarrhea. If you have been diagnosed with Crypto, do not go swimming for at least 2 weeks after your diarrhea stops. You can pass Crypto in your stool and contaminate water for several weeks after your symptoms have ended.
- When swimming, take kids on frequent bathroom breaks – waiting to hear "I have to go" may mean that it's already too late.
- Change diapers in changing rooms, not poolside or on the beach. Wash hands after changing diapers.

To report a suspected foodborne or waterborne illness, call the Minnesota Department of Health Foodborne Illness Hotline at 1-877-FOOD-ILL (or 651-201-5655 from the Twin Cities).

