

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal illness caused by tiny *cryptosporidium* parasites. This parasite can survive outside the body for long periods of time and is very difficult to disinfect with chlorine. *Cryptosporidium* is one of the most common causes of waterborne disease among humans in the United States.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

The parasites enter your body and travel to your small intestine, and then burrow into the walls of your intestines. Later, they are shed in your stool. Crypto can be spread by:

- Swallowing recreational water (e.g., water in swimming pools, fountains, lakes, rivers) contaminated with Crypto
- Drinking untreated water from a lake or river that is contaminated with Crypto
- Swallowing water, ice, or beverages contaminated with poop from infected humans or animals
- Eating undercooked food or drinking unpasteurized/raw apple cider or milk that gets contaminated with Crypto
- Touching your mouth with contaminated hands
- Hands can become contaminated through a variety of activities, such as touching surfaces or objects (e.g., toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails) that have been contaminated by poop from an infected person, changing diapers,

caring for an infected person, and touching an infected animal.

- Exposure to poop from an infected person through oral-anal sexual contact
- Crypto is not spread through contact with blood.

What are the signs and symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The first signs and symptoms of cryptosporidiosis usually appear within a week after infection and may include:

- Watery diarrhea
- Dehydration
- Lack of appetite
- Weight loss
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting

Symptoms may last for up to two weeks, though they may come and go periodically for up to a month, even in people with healthy immune systems. Some people with cryptosporidiosis may have no symptoms.

Who is most at risk?

- Children who attend childcare centers, including diaper-aged children
- Childcare workers
- Parents of infected children
- Caregivers who take care of infected people
- Pregnant women
- People with severely weakened immune systems

- International travelers
- People who drink unfiltered, untreated water
- People who drink from untreated shallow, unprotected wells
- People, including swimmers, who swallow water from contaminated sources
- People who handle infected calves or other animals like sheep
- People exposed to human poop through sexual contact

What type of health problems are caused by cryptosporidiosis?

Young children and pregnant women may be more likely to get dehydrated because of their diarrhea, so they should drink plenty of fluids while ill. Symptoms may be more severe and could lead to serious or life-threatening illness in people with severely weakened immune systems.

How is cryptosporidiosis diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask you to submit stool samples to check for infection. Because testing for Crypto can be difficult, you may be asked to submit several stool specimens over several days. Most laboratories don't routinely test for Crypto, so your healthcare provider should specifically request testing for Crypto.

How is cryptosporidiosis treated?

Most people who have a healthy immune system will recover without treatment. The symptoms of diarrhea can be treated. If you

have diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea may be especially life threatening to babies; therefore, parents should talk to their healthcare provider about fluid replacement therapy options for infants. Anti-diarrheal medicine may help slow down diarrhea, but talk to your healthcare provider before taking it. Specific therapy may be necessary for people with HIV. Talk to your healthcare provider.

How can cryptosporidiosis be prevented?

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet, before handling or eating food (especially for persons with diarrhea), and after every diaper change, especially if you work with diaper-aged children, even if you are wearing gloves.
- Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea (essential for children in diapers).
- Avoid water that might be contaminated.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Use safe, uncontaminated water to wash all food that is to be eaten raw.
- Avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling in countries with minimal water treatment and sanitation systems.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)
- [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#)

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