

CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is an illness caused by the protozoan *Cryptosporidium*, a single-celled parasite. *Cryptosporidium* is shed in the feces of infected humans, domestic animals, and wild animals. Infection occurs when the organism is subsequently ingested by a person.

How is it spread?

It may only require a few microscopic *Cryptosporidium* organisms to infect a person. Thus, cryptosporidiosis can be acquired by person to person or animal to person transmission and by drinking contaminated water. Person to person transmission can occur via direct contact or potentially by food handling if the infected person does not adequately wash his/her hands after using the toilet. Infected individuals can shed the organism in stool for several weeks after they recover from the illness.

Because cryptosporidiosis is transmitted by the fecal-oral route, persons with the greatest potential to transmit the organism include infected persons who have diarrhea, persons who are incontinent of stool, persons with poor personal hygiene, and diapered children.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for cryptosporidiosis. Fluid therapy is indicated if dehydration is a problem. Anti-diarrheal drugs reduce the motility of the intestines and may provide some temporary improvement.

How can we prevent Cryptosporidiosis?

- ▶ Thorough hand washing after using the toilet or changing diapers and before handling food.
- ▶ Avoid drinking raw milk and wash hands thoroughly after contact with cattle.
- ▶ Avoid drinking untreated and inadequately filtered surface water when camping or when traveling in developing countries.
- ▶ Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea.
- ▶ Avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling in countries with minimal water treatment or sanitation systems

SYMPTOMS OF CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

- ▶ Watery, profuse diarrhea
- ▶ Abdominal cramps
- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Loss of appetite

Cryptosporidiosis can be a life threatening disease in immune compromised persons (i.e. HIV, cancer, kidney dialysis patients). These persons may be unable to clear the parasite and may have a more severe and long lasting illness. The disease may be life threatening.



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