



CALHOUN COUNTY

Public Health Department

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Fact Sheet

Cryptosporidiosis

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis (Crypto) is a disease caused by microscopic germs – parasites called *Cryptosporidium*. It causes watery diarrhea and can be found in contaminated water, food, soil, or on surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces of humans or animals infected with the parasite. The parasite is the leading cause of waterborne disease outbreaks and can be found in every region of the United States and throughout the world. The parasite can survive outside the body for long periods of time and is very resistant to chlorine disinfection.

Who is at risk for cryptosporidiosis?

Both humans and animals can be infected by many species of Crypto. Those at higher risk to become infected with Crypto include:

- Children who attend daycare centers and childcare workers
- Parents or caregivers of infected individuals
- International travelers
- Backpackers, hikers, and campers who drink unfiltered, untreated water
- People who drink from untreated shallow, unprotected wells
- People who handle infected cattle
- People exposed to human feces through sexual contact
- Older Adults (75+)

How do you get cryptosporidiosis?

Crypto can be transmitted by:

- Swallowing recreational water (for example, the water in swimming pools, fountains, lakes, and rivers) contaminated with Crypto

- Drinking untreated water (including ice) from a lake or river that is contaminated with Crypto
- Eating undercooked food or drinking unpasteurized/raw apple cider or milk that gets contaminated with Crypto
- Touching your mouth with contaminated hands
- Exposure to feces from an infected person through oral-anal sexual contact

Crypto is **not** spread through blood contact.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

Symptoms of Crypto generally begin 2 to 10 days (average 7 days) after becoming infected with the parasite. Symptoms may include:

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

Symptoms usually last about 1 to 2 weeks (with a range of a few days to 4 or more weeks) in people with healthy immune systems. The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis is watery diarrhea. Some people with Crypto will have no symptoms at all. For people with weakened immune systems, younger children, and pregnant women, symptoms can develop into more serious illnesses.

How is cryptosporidiosis diagnosed?

The healthcare provider will request stool samples. However, individuals that are infected with Crypto shed the parasite irregularly in their feces. Therefore, cryptosporidiosis is not always found in every stool sample and healthcare providers may ask individuals to submit several stool samples from several different days to ensure an accurate diagnosis.

What is the treatment for cryptosporidiosis?

Most individuals with healthy immune systems will recover from cryptosporidiosis with minimal or no treatment. Individuals who have health concerns should talk to their healthcare provider.

This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

The following actions may help relieve symptoms:

- Drink plenty of fluids to remain well hydrated and avoid dehydration. For some people, diarrhea can be severe resulting in hospitalization due to dehydration. Infants, young children, and pregnant women are more likely to suffer dehydration due to diarrhea.
- Maintain a well-balanced diet.
- Avoid beverages that contain caffeine, such as tea, coffee, and many soft drinks.
- Avoid alcohol, as it can lead to dehydration.
- Over-the-counter anti-diarrheal medicine might help slow down diarrhea, but a healthcare provider should be consulted before such medicine is taken.
- Nitazoxanide is an FDA-approved over-the-counter anti-diarrheal medication that helps to slow diarrhea. Consult with your primary care provider or pharmacist for information about the medication.

How can cryptosporidiosis be prevented?

There is no cleaning method guaranteed to be completely effective against Crypto. However, you can lower the chance of spreading Crypto by taking the following precautions:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the toilet, after changing diapers, and before eating or preparing food. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not effective against Crypto.
- Wash linens, clothing, dishwasher- or dryer-safe soft toys, etc. soiled with feces or vomit as soon as possible.
 - Flush excess vomit or feces on clothes or objects down the toilet.
 - Use laundry detergent, and wash in hot water: 113°F or hotter for at least 20 minutes or at 122°F or hotter for at least 5 minutes.
 - Machine dry on the highest heat setting.
- For other household object and surfaces (for example, diaper-change areas):
 - Remove all visible feces.
 - Clean with soap and water.
 - Let dry completely for at least 4 hours, and if possible, expose to direct sunlight during that time.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after cleaning objects or surfaces that could be contaminated with Crypto.

How do I get more information on cryptosporidiosis?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383

 www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/general-info.html>

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