

Gastroenteritis - cryptosporidiosis

Cryptosporidiosis is a type of gastroenteritis (gastro) caused by the parasite *Cryptosporidium*. Symptoms can take between one and 12 days to develop after infection. Anyone can become infected with *Cryptosporidium* parasites.

Cryptosporidiosis occurs when the parasites are taken in by mouth. This can happen directly through eating contaminated food and water or, more commonly, from person to person or animal to person.

Symptoms may last several weeks

Cryptosporidiosis symptoms may last several weeks. Typical symptoms include:

- Watery diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps
- Bloating
- Vomiting
- Fever.

Cryptosporidiosis can be serious

Cryptosporidiosis usually causes mild symptoms. It can, however, be a serious infection for people whose immune systems are already weakened by disease.

Humans and animals can spread cryptosporidiosis

Cryptosporidium parasites live in the bowels of humans and in wild, pet and farm animals. People with cryptosporidiosis have the parasite in their faeces.

The infection spreads when:

- Infected people do not wash their hands properly after going to the toilet. Contaminated hands can then spread the parasites to food that may be eaten by others and surfaces that may be touched by others.
- Hands become contaminated while handling infected animals or changing the nappy of an infected infant.
- People drink contaminated water, unpasteurised milk or swallow contaminated swimming pool water.

Cryptosporidiosis thrives in public places

Outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis have been associated with child care centres, public swimming pools and contaminated water supplies. Most reported cases occur among:

- Young children and people in their household
- Travellers
- People in close contact with animals.

Treatment

Treatment usually involves supporting the patient. In severe cases, patients may need fluid and electrolyte replacement therapy.

Preventing the spread of cryptosporidiosis

You may remain infectious for several weeks after your diarrhoea stops. To prevent the spread of the infection:

- Keep children home from school or child care until their diarrhoea has stopped.

- Wash hands properly, especially after using the toilet, changing nappies and handling animals.
- Use paper towels when drying hands. This is important for food handlers.
- Food handlers, child care workers and health care workers must not work until symptoms have stopped.
- Do not swim for two weeks after diarrhoea has stopped.
- Clean bathrooms and other surfaces regularly.
- Filter or boil contaminated water before drinking.

See your doctor if you develop gastroenteritis

- If you think you or your child may have cryptosporidiosis, contact your doctor. The doctor will ask you for a stool (faeces or 'poo') sample for testing. If the results of the tests show that you have cryptosporidiosis, the doctor will be able to provide you with advice and will also notify the Department of Health Victoria.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local council's health department
- Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit, Department of Health Victoria Tel. 1300 651 160

Things to remember

- Do not swim for two weeks after diarrhoea has stopped.
- Keep children home from child care or school until their diarrhoea has stopped.
- Cryptosporidiosis can cause serious and prolonged illness for people with weakened immune systems.
- Thorough handwashing will help prevent the spread of cryptosporidiosis.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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