
Gastroenteritis - cryptosporidiosis

Summary

- 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.
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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 of cryptosporidiosis

Cryptosporidiosis symptoms may last several weeks. Typical symptoms include:

- watery diarrhoea
- stomach cramps
- bloating
- vomiting
- fever.

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

Causes of 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 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 for cryptosporidiosis

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

Prevention tips for 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 healthcare 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.

Seek medical attention 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 and Human Services, Victoria.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** Tel. **1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Your local council health department
- **Communicable Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit, Department of Health and Human Services**, Victorian Government Tel. **1300 651 160**

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

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