



Cryptosporidiosis

What is cryptosporidiosis?

- Cryptosporidiosis, often referred to as 'crypto' is an infection of the bowel caused by the parasite *Cryptosporidium parvum*.

How is it spread?

Spread occurs when hands, objects (such as toys), food or water contaminated by tiny amounts of faeces from infected people or animals are put into the mouth of an uninfected person.

Cryptosporidium is highly resistant to chlorine disinfection, this can result in spread of the disease through contaminated swimming or wading pools.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms generally develop between 1 to 12 days, with the average being 7 days after the person is infected.

The most common symptom is watery diarrhoea, which often occurs with stomach cramps. Other symptoms may include loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, headache and mild fever.

Healthy young children generally recover within a few days. Healthy adults generally recover within 30 days but may have periods of seeming to be better then becoming worse again during this time. People with weakened immune systems may develop a more severe and longer lasting illness.

Some people infected with *Cryptosporidium* may have no symptoms or only a brief episode of diarrhoea.

What is the infectious period?

While the *Cryptosporidium* parasite remains in their faeces, infected people can pass the infection on to others. This is usually while

they are ill and up to 2 months after their illness has resolved.

Who is at risk?

The most severe infections occur in people with weakened immune systems (eg people on steroids or chemotherapy and those with HIV/AIDs).

Children who attend childcare facilities are at greater risk of infections spread through faecal contamination. Spread occurs when children share toys or food that has become contaminated and place it in their mouths. Particular care has to be taken wherever there are children in nappies.

Travellers, animal handlers and men who have sex with men are also more at risk of infection.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for cryptosporidiosis.

Anyone with diarrhoea should drink extra fluids to avoid dehydration. Children with diarrhoea, who vomit or who refuse extra fluids should see a doctor. Anyone with prolonged or severe diarrhoea, or who have symptoms that concern them, should see a doctor.

Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given, especially to children, except where specifically advised by a doctor.

How can cryptosporidiosis be prevented?

Good hygiene is the best way to prevent cryptosporidiosis.

Hands should be washed thoroughly with warm soapy water:

- after going to the toilet
- before preparing or handling food

- after every nappy change
- after changing soiled linen
- after contact with pets or farm animals
- after gardening or other direct contact with soil

Other measures include:

- never change nappies on tables or counters where food is prepared or eaten
- clean change areas with warm soapy water and disinfectant after every nappy change
- clean books, toys, equipment, furnishings, floors and toilets regularly (including toilet door handles)
- do not consume unpasteurised milk and untreated or inadequately filtered water
- wash and/or peel fruit and vegetables before eating them

People with diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food that will be eaten by others.

How can it be controlled?

Anyone with diarrhoea should not attend childcare/school until there has not been a loose bowel action for 24 hours. People with diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food that will be eaten by others.

Anyone with cryptosporidiosis should not swim, wade or paddle in public pools for at least 2 weeks after the diarrhoea has resolved.

For more information contact your nearest Centre for Disease Control (CDC)

Darwin	8922 8044
Katherine	8973 9049
Nhulunbuy	8987 0357
Tennant Creek	8962 4259
Alice Springs	8951 7540

Disease Control fact sheets are available from your nearest CDC or from our web site at www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc/cdc.shtml

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