

Cryptosporidiosis

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is an infection of the intestines caused by a very small parasite called *Cryptosporidium*. It affects both man and animals such as poultry, fish, cats, dogs and livestock. It is believed that only a few parasitic eggs are needed to cause illness. Symptoms usually start two to ten days after exposure to the parasite. Not everyone who is infected will feel sick. If symptoms do occur, they may include watery diarrhea, cramps, nausea, vomiting and mild fever. Symptoms may come and go but usually resolve after 30 days. Infections may be life-threatening in people with immune system problems, such as AIDS, cancer, etc.

Outbreaks of Cryptosporidiosis have occurred in day care centres and in locations where drinking water or swimming pools have been contaminated. In many cases, the source of infection is hard to determine.

How Cryptosporidium infections happen?

Cryptosporidium is often found in the bowels of infected animals. These animals may have a bowel movement in or near water supplies (rivers, lakes, etc.) and transfer the parasite to the water. The infection can also be spread from hand to mouth, for example by touching an infected animal with your hands and not washing your hands prior to eating. A person can also become infected by hand to mouth transfer of the parasite from contaminated surfaces or items. This is possible because the parasite can live outside the body for several months under moist conditions.

How Do You Prevent Cryptosporidiosis?

- Thorough hand washing is the best prevention. Make sure hands are washed properly after using the toilet, handling diapers, pets or livestock and before preparing foods.
- Avoid drinking water directly from rivers, creeks or lakes, and when you are uncertain whether the water has been properly treated (such as during foreign travel).
- Unpasteurized milk or milk products should also be avoided.
- When travelling, camping or hiking, or if a "boil water" advisory has been issued, bring the water to a boil for 5 full minutes. This water should be used for drinking, brushing teeth, rinsing dentures or contact lenses, making ice cubes, washing uncooked fruit and vegetables, and in recipes that require water. Dishes should be washed with water that has been boiled.

Links to More Information

[Health Canada](#) - Water Talk - Giardia and Cryptosporidium in Drinking Water

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