

Cryptosporidiosis (“Crypto”) Fact Sheet

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

Basic Information

Cryptosporidium is a microscopic parasite that causes the diarrheal disease cryptosporidiosis. The parasite and the disease are also referred to as "Crypto." *Cryptosporidium* is a frequent cause of waterborne disease among humans in the United States. Crypto is found throughout the world.

Both humans and animals can be infected by many species of *Cryptosporidium*. The parasite is able to survive outside the body for long periods of time and is very resistant to chlorine disinfection.

Transmission

Cryptosporidium live in the intestines of humans and animals and are shed in the stool of an infected person or animal. Shedding of Crypto in the stool begins when the symptoms start and can last for weeks after the symptoms (e.g., diarrhea) stop.

Humans become infected with Crypto in the following ways:

- Swallowing contaminated recreational water (pools, splash pads, hot tubs, lakes, etc.)
- Drinking water or beverages contaminated with feces
- Eating uncooked food that has been in contact with feces
- Touching surfaces or objects that have contacted feces and then touching your mouth
- Petting or handling infected livestock, particularly young calves
- By exposure to human feces through sexual contact

Symptoms

The most common symptom is watery diarrhea; other symptoms include stomach cramps or pain, fever, dehydration, and weight loss. Symptoms usually begin 2-10 days after becoming infected and last about 1-2 weeks. You may seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse again before the illness ends. Some people with Crypto have no symptoms. Young children, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems are more likely to have severe illness.

Risk Factors

People who are most likely to become infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- Children who attend day care centers
- Child care workers
- Parents of infected children
- People who take care of others with crypto
- International travelers
- Backpackers, hikers, and campers who drink unfiltered, untreated water
- People who drink from untreated shallow, unprotected wells
- People who swallow water from contaminated sources
- People who handle infected cattle
- People exposed to human feces through sexual contact

Crypto is the most common cause of outbreaks in treated recreational waters like swimming pools, splash pads, and interactive water features because of its high resistance to disinfectants like chlorine.

Treatment

If you suspect that you have cryptosporidiosis, see your health care provider. Most people diagnosed with Crypto who have healthy immune systems will recover without treatment; however, your health care provider may prescribe an anti-parasitic drug to alleviate symptoms. Prevent dehydration from diarrhea by drinking plenty of fluids. Parents should talk to their health care provider about fluid replacement therapy options for infants.

Prevention

Cryptosporidium can be very contagious and is resistant to chlorine. To protect yourself:

- Wash hands vigorously with soap and water for at least 20 seconds:
 - Before preparing or eating food
 - After using the toilet
 - After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
 - Before and after tending to someone who is ill with diarrhea
 - After handling an animal or animal waste
- At recreational water venues (pools, splash pads, lakes, ocean, etc.):
 - Do not swallow water while swimming
 - Wash children thoroughly (especially their bottoms) with soap and water after they use the toilet or their diapers are changed
 - Take children on frequent bathroom breaks and check their diapers often
 - Change diapers in the bathroom, not at the poolside/beach
- Avoid direct contact with the feces of all animals, particularly young animals
- If cleaning up animal feces, use disposable gloves. When done, remove gloves and wash hands
- Wash hands after any contact with animals or their living areas
- Wash hands after gardening, even if wearing gloves
- If immunocompromised, avoid close contact with any person or animal that has crypto and do not handle animal feces
- Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, streams, or shallow wells
- Do not drink untreated water or use ice when in countries where the water might be unsafe
- Appropriately disinfect or filter unsafe drinking water or drink bottled water
- Use safe, uncontaminated water to wash all food that is to be eaten raw
- Do not eat uncooked foods when traveling in countries with poor water and food sanitation
- Use a barrier during oral-anal sex
- Wash hands immediately after handling a condom used during anal sex and after touching the anus or rectal area

Individuals diagnosed with crypto should follow these precautions to avoid spreading crypto to others:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and before eating or preparing food
- Do not go swimming if you have crypto and for at least 2 weeks after the diarrhea stops
- Avoid sexual practices that might result in oral exposure to stool (e.g., oral-anal contact)
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has a weakened immune system
- Children with diarrhea should be excluded from child care until the diarrhea has stopped

For more information visit the CDC's website: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/>.