

# CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### **What is Cryptosporidiosis?**

*Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by microscopic parasites (Cryptosporidium parvum) present in the intestinal tract. Once an animal or person is infected, the parasite lives in the intestine and passes in the stool. The parasite can survive outside the body for long periods of time and is very resistant to chlorine-based disinfectants.*

### **How is it spread?**

*Cryptosporidium* is found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with infected human or animal feces. If a person swallows the parasite, they become infected. The parasite can be spread by:

- putting something in your mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with feces of a person or animal infected with *Cryptosporidium*.
- swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium* from swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams. Note: *Cryptosporidium* can survive for days in swimming pools with adequate chlorine levels.
- eating uncooked food contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*. Thoroughly wash all vegetables and fruits you plan to eat raw, with clean, safe water.
- swallowing *Cryptosporidium* picked up from contaminated surfaces like bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys.

### **How is it treated?**

Cryptosporidiosis is diagnosed in a laboratory by examining a stool sample. Most people who have a healthy immune system will recover without treatment. If you have diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea may be especially life threatening to babies; therefore, parents should talk to their health care provider about fluid replacement therapy options for infants.

### **How can we prevent Cryptosporidiosis?**

If you have been diagnosed with *Cryptosporidium*, it is especially important to wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before eating or preparing food, to avoid spreading the disease to others. And do not swim in recreational water for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea stops.

No disinfectant is guaranteed to be completely effective against *Cryptosporidium*; however, hydrogen peroxide is usually effective. In an outbreak situation, soak contaminated surfaces with a 3-6% concentration of hydrogen peroxide and leave on for 20 minutes, then rinse with water. Clean and disinfect bathrooms, diaper-change areas, and food preparation surfaces daily. Dishwasher-safe toys can be disinfected in a commercial dishwasher that has a dry cycle or a final rinse that exceeds 113°F for 20 minutes or 122°F for 5 minutes or 162°F for 1 minute. Cloth toys may be washed and heat-dried on the highest clothes dryer heat setting for 30 minutes.

### **SYMPTOMS OF CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS**

- Watery diarrhea
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Dehydration
- Weight loss

Symptoms generally begin 2 to 12 days (average 7 days) after infection and usually last about 1 to 2 weeks.

Some people will have no symptoms at all.

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