



Cryptosporidiosis

Cryptosporidiosis reportable to local or state health departments.

Consult the health department before posting or distributing the Parent/Guardian fact sheet.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Cryptosporidium, a parasite.

Symptoms

Frequent watery diarrhea, vomiting, and low-grade fever that lasts for several days. Other symptoms include stomach cramps, loss of appetite, and weight loss. Illness usually lasts from 6 to 14 days; symptoms can be present for ranging from a few days to more than four weeks. Infected persons may have mild symptoms or may not have any symptoms. In persons with weakened immune systems, *Cryptosporidium* can cause very serious illness and even result in death.

Spread

Cryptosporidium parasites leave the body through the stool of an infected person and enter another person when hands, food, or objects (such as toys) contaminated with stool are placed in the mouth. Spread can occur when people do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Spread can also occur through contact with infected pets and farm animals, particularly cattle.

Outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis have occurred as a result of eating food and drinking water contaminated by the parasite. Waterborne outbreaks have occurred both as a result of drinking contaminated water and from swimming or playing in contaminated lakes, pools, and splash pads. This is due to *Cryptosporidium's* high tolerance for chlorine which allows it to survive for long periods of time in chlorinated swimming water.

Incubation

It takes 1 to 14 days, usually about 7 days, from the time a person is exposed until symptoms begin.

Contagious period

As long as *Cryptosporidium* is present in the stool, a person can pass the parasite to other people. *Cryptosporidium* can be present in stool for at least 2 weeks after symptoms have stopped.

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Exclusion

Childcare

Until 24 hours after diarrhea has stopped.

School

None, unless the child is not feeling well and/or has diarrhea and needs to use the bathroom frequently. Exclusion may be necessary during outbreaks.

Anyone with *Cryptosporidium* should not go in lakes, pools, splash pads, water parks, or hot tubs until 2 weeks after diarrhea has stopped.

Staff with *Cryptosporidium* may be restricted from working in food service. Call your local health department to see if these restrictions apply.

Diagnosis

Recommend that parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has symptoms. There is a lab test to detect *Cryptosporidium* in the stool.

Treatment

An antiparasitic drug has been approved for treatment of children (12 months of age or older) and adults with healthy immune systems; however, the majority of healthy persons infected with *Cryptosporidium* get better without any specific treatment.

Prevention

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** Staff should closely monitor handwashing of all children after they have used the bathroom or have been diapered.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water immediately after handling pets and touching farm animals, particularly cattle.
- Clean and disinfect diapering area and potty chairs after each use. Clean and disinfect bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, object, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Avoid swallowing water when in lakes, pools, splash pads, water parks, or hot tubs. *Cryptosporidium* can survive for days in swimming pools with adequate chlorine levels.

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Disinfecting Solutions

Bleach solutions are **not** effective for inactivating *Cryptosporidium*. Mechanically cleaning surfaces by scrubbing with soap or detergent and water will help reduce germs. Contact your local health department for disinfection recommendations if an outbreak of cryptosporidiosis occurs

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

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