

# Cryptosporidiosis

## Your questions answered

### What is 'crypto'?

Cryptosporidiosis or "crypto" is a diarrheal disease caused by microscopic parasites, *Cryptosporidium*, that can live in the intestine of humans and animals and is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal. The parasite is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time and makes it very resistant to chlorine-based disinfectants.

During the past two decades, crypto has become recognized as one of the most common causes of waterborne disease (recreational water and drinking water) in humans in the United States. The parasite is found in every region of the United States and throughout the world.

### How is crypto spread?

Crypto can be spread:

- By putting something in your mouth or accidentally swallowing something that has come into contact with feces (poop) of a person or animal infected with Crypto.
- By swallowing recreational water contaminated with Crypto. Recreational water is water in swimming pools, hot tubs, Jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds or streams. Recreational water can be contaminated with sewage or feces from humans or animals.
- By swallowing water or beverages contaminated with feces from infected humans or animals.
- By eating uncooked food contaminated with Crypto. Thoroughly wash with uncontaminated water all vegetables and fruits you plan to eat raw. See below for information on making water safe.
- By touching your mouth with contaminated hands. Hands can become contaminated through a variety of activities, such as touching surfaces (e.g., toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails) that have been contaminated by feces from an infected person, changing diapers, caring for an infected person and handling an infected cow or calf.
- By exposure to human feces through sexual contact.

### What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis is watery diarrhea.

Other symptoms include:

- Stomach cramps or pain
- Dehydration
- Nausea
- Vomiting

# What Can **YOU** Do?

- Fever
- Weight loss

Some people with Crypto will have no symptoms at all. While the small intestine is the site most commonly affected, Crypto infections could possibly affect other areas of the digestive tract or the respiratory tract. Symptoms of cryptosporidiosis generally begin two to 10 days (average seven days) after becoming infected with the parasite.

## **How long do symptoms last?**

In persons with healthy immune systems, symptoms usually last about one to two weeks. The symptoms may go in cycles in which you may seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse again before the illness ends.

## **How is crypto diagnosed?**

Your health care provider will ask you to submit fecal samples to see if you are infected. Because testing for crypto can be difficult, you may be asked to submit several specimens over several days. Tests for crypto are not routinely done in most laboratories. Therefore, your health care provider should specifically request testing for the parasite.

## **How is crypto treated?**

Nitazoxanide has been FDA-approved for treatment of diarrhea caused by *Cryptosporidium* in people with healthy immune systems and is available by prescription. Most people who have healthy immune systems will recover without treatment. Diarrhea can be managed by drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to 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. Anti-diarrheal medicine may help slow down diarrhea, but a health care provider should be consulted before such medicine is taken.

For more information on cryptosporidiosis, call the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department at **(785) 843-0721** or visit us on the web at: [www.ldchealth.org](http://www.ldchealth.org)

This fact sheet is for information only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have an infection, consult with your health care provider.

This fact sheet is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Health and Safety topic fact sheets. **UPDATED 12/8/11**