

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrhoeal disease caused by a microscopic parasite, *Cryptosporidium* species, which lives in the intestine of infected humans and animals. There are many species of *Cryptosporidium* that infect humans and a wide range of animals. *Cryptosporidium parvum* and *Cryptosporidium hominis* are the most prevalent species causing disease in humans.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

Symptoms include diarrhoea, loose or watery stools, stomach cramps, upset stomach, and a slight fever. Some people have no symptoms.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Usually 2–10 days after infection.

How long will it last?

Approximately 2 weeks for people with normal immune systems. Symptoms may come and go. You may seem to improve for a few days, then feel worse, before the illness ends.

How are cryptosporidia spread?

Millions of *Cryptosporidium* cysts can be released in the stool from infected individuals or animals. The parasite is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time before being ingested and causing infection. *Cryptosporidium* infection is highly associated with travelling, exposure to farm animals, and person-to-person transmission in settings such as day care centres and swimming pools.

Should I worry about spreading infection to others?

Cryptosporidia can be very contagious. Follow these guidelines to minimise the risk:

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing nappies, and before eating or preparing food.
- Avoid swimming for at least 2 weeks after diarrhoea stops. Cysts passed in a stool can contaminate water for several weeks after symptoms have ended. *Cryptosporidium* cysts are chlorine-resistant and can live for days in pools.
- Avoid faecal exposure during sex.
- Keep children with diarrhoea at home for 24 hours after diarrhoea has completely stopped.

How is cryptosporidia diagnosed?

By stool sample microscopy or PCR.

Is treatment available?

There is no specific treatment available. Replacement of fluid lost through diarrhoea may be needed, particularly for young children and pregnant women. Drink plenty of fluids. People with an impaired immune system (HIV/AIDS, cancer and transplant patients) are at risk of more serious disease and prolonged illness. If antimicrobial therapy is required (e.g. immunosuppressed), then nitazoxanide may be useful (available on SAS).