

Cryptosporidium

Cryptosporidium is a parasite that causes watery diarrhea. It can cause diarrhea in anyone; however people with weakened immune systems can have severe or life-threatening disease. It is also referred to as “Crypto” which is used interchangeably for *Cryptosporidium* or *Cryptococcus*. If there is any question regarding the organism for which you have tested positive, contact your healthcare provider.

Sources of Infection: *Cryptosporidium* parasites are found throughout the United States and around the world.

- The parasite lives in the intestine of infected humans and animals.
- It can be found in soil, food, water or surfaces that have been contaminated with feces (poop) from infected humans or animals.
- You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite (i.e. swallowing contaminated water, eating contaminated raw or undercooked food, touching your mouth with contaminated hands, etc...).

Symptoms:

- Watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever and weight loss
- Symptoms usually begin about 1 week after becoming infected and can last 1-2 weeks. Some people may have a recurrence of symptoms after a brief period of recovery before the illness ends (up to 30days).
- People with HIV, organ transplants, cancer or on chronic steroids are at risk for more serious infection and should see their doctor if sick

Diagnosis:

- *Cryptosporidium* can be diagnosed by performing a specific test on stool samples.

Treatment:

- The primary treatment for *Cryptosporidium* is supportive. See your healthcare provider if ill.
- Individuals that are sick should drink lots of fluids (non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated beverages) to prevent dehydration.
- Please consult a healthcare provider before taking anti-diarrheal medicine.
- Nitazoxanide is the only FDA-approved treatment of diarrhea caused by *Cryptosporidium* and is available only by prescription.

Prevention:

- Basic good hand hygiene is critically important in preventing the spread of *Cryptosporidium*.
- Wash hands with **soap and water** for at least 20 seconds.
- * Alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not effectively kill *Cryptosporidium* *.
- Do not swallow the water you swim in or drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, ponds or shallow wells.
- Remove obvious contamination from any surfaces and clean according to manufacturer’s instructions. Wash clothing and bedding with normal detergents in a washer / dryer.
- **IF YOU HAVE BEEN SICK**, please **avoid the following activities** while you are having symptoms and for at least 2 weeks after your symptoms resolve:
 - Swimming or water activities in ANY type of water (pools, lakes, splash pads, water tables, etc ...)
 - Preparing food (for family or at a restaurant)

Where can I find more information?

- Go to cdc.gov and type Cryptosporidium in SEARCH box.