



# CRYPTOSPORIDIUM

## WHAT IS CRYPTOSPORIDIUM?

Cryptosporidium is a one-celled parasite that can cause a gastrointestinal illness called cryptosporidiosis.

## WHO CAN GET CRYPTOSPORIDIUM?

Anyone can get cryptosporidium.

## WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF CRYPTOSPORIDIUM?

- Symptoms appear anywhere from 2 to 12 days after ingestion. The average is 7 days.
- Symptoms include: diarrhea, abdominal cramps, headaches, nausea, vomiting and a low-grade fever.
- Symptoms can last for weeks and may result in weight loss and dehydration.
- Symptoms are more severe for people with weakened immune systems and can lead to death.

## HOW IS CRYPTOSPORIDIUM SPREAD?

A person can be infected by consuming contaminated water or food. Direct or hand-to-mouth transfer of the parasite from human or animal feces can also cause infection. Streams or lakes may be contaminated by animal feces and infect swimmers or hikers drinking untreated water.

## HOW IS CRYPTOSPORIDIUM DIAGNOSED?

Generally, a stool sample is required to isolate the parasite for confirmation of cryptosporidium.

## HOW IS CRYPTOSPORIDIUM TREATED?

- If you think you may have cryptosporidiosis, see a health care provider, especially if you have a weakened immune system.
- For people with healthy immune systems, most recover without treatment; however, treatment is available that may reduce symptoms.
- An anti-parasitical medication is prescribed to help relieve symptoms.

## HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT CRYPTOSPORIDIUM?

- Anyone exposed to feces is at risk. This includes those drinking contaminated water while camping or traveling, childcare workers, young children who attend childcare centers, persons exposed to human feces by sexual contact, and caregivers who might come in contact with feces while caring for a person infected with cryptosporidiosis. Farm animals and farm products (unpasteurized apple cider) have caused exposures. Children are especially susceptible because they put so many things into their mouths.
- The single, most effective way to avoid illness is to wash your hands often with soap and water. During boil water advisories, use water that has been boiled and cooled, filtered or safely bottled for washing dishes, fruits and vegetables.
- Always wash your hands before handling food and dishes and after using the toilet, gardening, changing diapers or handling pets or farm animals, particularly young animals like calves.
- Wash fruits and vegetables with safe water, especially if you plan to eat them raw. You can also peel fruit that you will not cook.
- Never cook for other people if you have diarrhea.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk or dairy products and unpasteurized juices. Cooking kills Cryptosporidium and other microorganisms.
- Do not swim in public pools or lakes if you have diarrhea.
- Don't swallow any water from lakes, rivers, pools or Jacuzzis. Water swallowed accidentally while swimming may contain the organism.
- Take care when traveling in developing countries. Foods and drinks, in particular raw fruits, and vegetables, tap water or ice made from tap water, unpasteurized milk or dairy products, and items from street vendors may be contaminated with Cryptosporidium. Talk to your health care provider about other precautions you may want to take when traveling abroad.
- Cryptosporidiosis is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department in Lewis County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 360-740-1223 during business hours or leave a voicemail on our confidential reporting after hours line at 360-740-1275.



## WHEN SHOULD I STAY HOME FROM WORK, SCHOOL, OR CHILDCARE?

### YOU SHOULD NOT ATTEND WORK, SCHOOL, OR CHILDCARE IF ONE OF THE FOLLOWING APPLIES:

- You have fever, diarrhea, headache, nausea, vomiting, or abdominal cramping.
- You do not feel well enough to participate in regular activities.