



Cryptosporidiosis

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is an illness caused by the protozoan *Cryptosporidium*, a single-celled parasite.

What are the signs and symptoms of Cryptosporidiosis?

The most common symptom is diarrhea, which is usually watery and profuse, and often accompanied by abdominal cramping. Nausea, vomiting, fever, headache and loss of appetite may also occur. Some people infected with *Cryptosporidium* may not become ill, but could pass on the parasite to others.

All people are presumed susceptible to infection with *Cryptosporidium*. In most healthy people with normal immune systems, signs and symptoms generally persist for four weeks or less, although they may improve, and then worsen during that time period. However, immune-compromised people may be unable to clear the parasite and may have much more severe and long-lasting illness. Some examples of immune-compromised people include those receiving cancer chemotherapy, kidney dialysis patients, people on steroid therapy, people infected with HIV, and patients with Crohn's disease.

The infection is diagnosed by identifying the parasite during a microscopic examination of the stool.

How is it spread?

Cryptosporidium is shed in the feces of infected humans, domestic animals and wild animals. Infection occurs when the organism is ingested by a person. It may only take the ingestion of a few microscopic *Cryptosporidium* organisms for illness to occur. Cryptosporidiosis can be acquired by person-to-person or animal-to-person transmission, and by drinking contaminated water. Person-to-person transmission can occur via direct contact or, potentially, by food handling if the infected person does not adequately wash his/her hands after using the toilet. Infected individuals can shed the organism in stool for several weeks after they recover from the illness. Outside the body, the organism may remain infective for two to six months or longer in a moist environment.

For further information, please call:

York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653

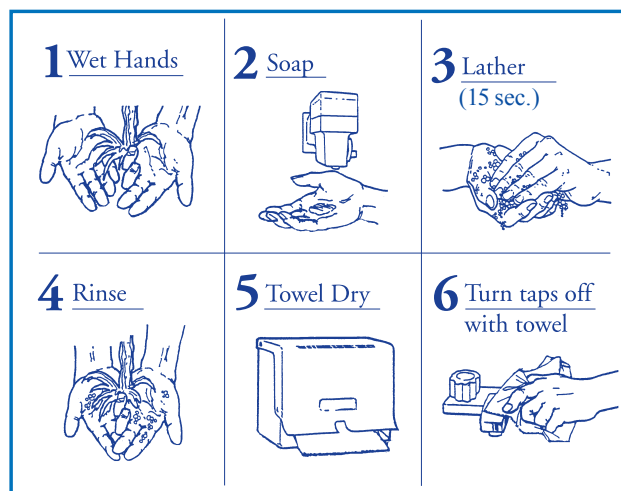
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Because Cryptosporidiosis is transmitted by the fecal-oral route, people with the greatest potential to transmit the organism include infected people who have diarrhea, people who are incontinent of stool, people with poor personal hygiene and diapered children.

The degree to which a previously infected person is immune to subsequent *Cryptosporidium* infection is unclear. There may be some resistance to re-infection, but it can likely be overwhelmed by a sufficiently large dose of the parasite, resulting in a recurrence of the illness.

How to avoid getting or transmitting Cryptosporidiosis:

- Wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing diapers and before eating or handling food
- Wash hands thoroughly after contact with animals (e.g., cattle and other domesticated and wild animals)
- Wash all fruits and vegetables with safe water or peel before eating
- Avoid drinking raw milk
- Avoid drinking untreated and inadequately filtered surface water when camping or when travelling in developing countries
- Drink water from a safe supply. If you are unsure of the supply, drink bottled water or boil water to a rolling boil for one minute. Remember that ice cubes made from contaminated water may also carry the parasite.



Note: Many water filters that are available commercially for home use are ineffective in filtering this organism because of its small size (about four microns).

Is there a treatment for Cryptosporidiosis?

Although generally not required, treatment is available and may be prescribed by a physician in certain cases.

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