

Facts About Cryptosporidiosis

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a gastrointestinal illness caused by *Cryptosporidium*, a infectious pathogen that lives in the intestines of humans and mammals. Both the disease and the organism itself are commonly referred to as **Crypto**. Crypto is one of the most common causes of waterborne diseases in the United States: outbreaks related to recreational and drinking water increase every year. It is highly contagious and when left untreated, a person can become re-infected and/or infect others. Crypto is commonly transmitted by swallowing organisms from water, food, hands or other surfaces that have been contaminated with the organism. Crypto is most common during the summer and early fall. It occurs most frequently in young children (under the age of 10) and their caregivers. While anyone can be infected with Crypto, people with weakened immune systems (malnourished children, the elderly, patients receiving cancer chemotherapy patients with HIV/AIDS, etc.) can develop serious, life-threatening illnesses from Crypto.

Symptoms

Crypto symptoms usually begin within 2 to 10 days after exposure and generally last one to two weeks in people with healthy immune systems. Common symptoms include watery diarrhea, stomach cramps or pain, dehydration, nausea, vomiting, fever and weight loss.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of Crypto can be complex and time-consuming because the organisms are very small and difficult to see under a microscope. Confirming a diagnosis of Crypto normally involves examining multiple stool samples over a period of several days.

Other Facts about Crypto

- ◆ The word “Crypto” comes from a Greek word meaning “hidden.”
- ◆ Crypto is resistant to chlorine and other chemicals commonly used in recreational and drinking water.
- ◆ Crypto is not killed by alcohol gels and hand sanitizers.
- ◆ People can continue to pass Crypto in their stools for several weeks following illness.
- ◆ When doctors suspect Crypto, they sometimes treat patients before a definitive diagnosis is secured.
- ◆ If you suspect you or a loved one has Crypto you should consult your doctor or primary care clinician.
- ◆ Transmission of Crypto is not limited to ingesting contaminated water. Food and person-to-person transmission may be at least as important as drinking water and may be more likely to transmit higher dose exposures.

How Can Crypto be Prevented and Treated?

You can help to break the chain of transmission of Crypto if you:

- Avoid swallowing water while swimming, boating, or engaging in other recreational activities.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables thoroughly with clean water before eating them.
- Wash your hands carefully before you eat, after using the restroom or changing diapers, after you have cared for anyone with diarrhea, and any time you may have been in contact with contaminated surfaces.
- Stay away from swimming pools and other recreational waters if you or a family member has had diarrhea.

Supportive Care and Treatment

- Doctors recommend drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration during infection with Crypto and other illness causing diarrhea.
- A prescription medicine called nitazoxanide (Alinia[®]) may be used to treat Crypto in both adults and children 12 months of age and over.
- Nitazoxanide is available as a tablet for adults and as a liquid suspension. A three-day treatment regimen is recommended.
- Side effects of nitazoxanide are similar to those of a placebo (sugar pill).
- Nitazoxanide has not been shown to be effective for the treatment of diarrhea caused by Crypto in HIV-infected or patients or patients with weak immune systems.

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- FACT:** According to the CDC, Crypto has become one of the most common causes of waterborne diseases (recreational and drinking water) in the United States, with outbreaks increasing annually
- FACT:** Crypto is a chlorine-resistant pathogen that poses a serious public health threat because contamination of drinking or swimming pool water can lead to large community outbreaks
- FACT:** Crypto is spread by contact with contaminated water, food and surfaces. Swallowing water during recreational water activities is a common way Crypto is spread.
- FACT:** The tell-tale sign of Crypto infection is *frequent, watery diarrhea that is not like other cases of diarrhea*. Other symptoms include dehydration, weight loss, stomach cramps or pain, fever, nausea and vomiting. Symptoms generally begin within two to ten days after exposure and last one to two weeks
- FACT:** Crypto is highly contagious and when left untreated, a person can become re-infected and/or infect others. Crypto can be shed in the stool for many weeks after symptoms clear
- FACT:** Dehydration is the most common problem people develop after being infected with Crypto
- FACT:** Persons with weak immune systems may develop prolonged illness with severe dehydration and other life-threatening complications
- FACT:** Maintenance of adequate fluid intake is vital for persons with Crypto and other types of diarrhea
- FACT:** Persons who suspect diarrhea related to Crypto should consult a health-care provider.