

## FACT SHEET

### Cryptosporidiosis “Crypto”

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrhea illness caused by a parasite infecting the GI and respiratory tracts. During 2001-2010, Crypto was the leading cause of waterborne disease outbreaks in the United States. It is found worldwide. <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/general-info.html>. For childcare settings please see: <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/childcare/outbreak.html>

- Cause:** *Cryptosporidium hominis* or *cryptosporidium parvum* are microscopic protozoan organisms. The tiny parasites live in the intestines of humans and animals and is shed in feces (stool) of an infected person or animal. The organism is covered with a protective outer shell-like coating that allows it to survive outside of the body and is very resistant to chlorinated water. It is one of the most common water borne diseases that people get from swimming pools, water parks, splash pads and drinking water. It is often called “Crypto” and is highly infectious.
- Symptoms:** The most common symptom is profuse watery diarrhea. Abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, and fever are also symptoms of Crypto. Symptoms wax and wane but generally last for about two weeks. Sometimes it can continue to be passed in the stool for 30 days.
- Spread:** The organism can be spread in a number of ways: When the organism leaves the body through the stool of an infected person and enter through the mouth of another person by hands, food or objects that are placed in the mouth. Animal-to-person spread can also occur especially with young animals less than six months old. Crypto can be spread by swallowing food or water contaminated with infected stool, including water in the recreational water parks, swimming pools, etc. Other potential ways of infection include eating fruits and vegetables contaminated by cryptosporidium from the soil.
- Incubation:** Symptoms usually begin within 1 to 14 days, with an average of 7 days, after ingestion of the organism.
- Contagious Period:** An infected person is contagious from the onset of symptoms and for as long as the organism is present in the stools. It may take several weeks to completely rid the cryptosporidia from the stools. Outside the body, the organism may remain infectious for two to six months in a moist environment.
- High Risk:** People who have compromised immune systems (transplant patients, people with AIDS, autoimmune disorders or those taking immune suppressive medications and those with cancer) are at higher risk for getting seriously ill.
- Precautions:** **GOOD HANDWASHING before/after eating and before food preparation. Use gloves when changing diapers and WASH HANDS with soap and water afterward diaper changing. WASH HANDS after using the toilet. DO NOT SWIM in recreational water (swimming pools,**

***water parks, splash pad, hot tubs, lakes, rivers, etc.) for several weeks if you have cryptosporidiosis!***

- Reportable:** Within 7 days by the provider to the Local or State Public Health Department.
- Diagnosis:** Physicians can order a lab test from a stool sample and the test will identify the parasite.
- Treatment:** Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Very young children and pregnant women may become dehydrated more easily; talk to your physician about fluid replacement. Antidiarrheal medications may slow the symptoms down but do not cure the infection; talk to your physician before use. Your physician may prescribe 3 day course of nitazoxanide oral suspension which has been licensed by the Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of children with diarrhea caused by crypto. Otherwise healthy people can resolve the infection on their own.
- Exclusion:** Stay home from work, school, or daycare until you are no longer having diarrhea.
- Prevention/  
Control:**
- 1) Wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds after using the toilet, changing diapers, handling and cleaning up after pets, and before preparing or eating food. Thorough hand-washing is the best way to prevent spread of infectious diseases found in the intestinal tract. Parent/guardians and child care staff should closely monitor hand-washing of all children after bathroom use or diapering. If hand sanitizers are used, they may be used only after thorough hand-washing.
  - 2) Clean and disinfect contaminated areas (diapering area, toilets, potty-chairs) and sanitize toys at least daily and when soiled.
- **Disinfect surfaces and objects.**

**Note:** soak contaminated surfaces for 20 minutes with a 3% hydrogen peroxide (99% kill rate) and then rinse them thoroughly. No disinfectant is guaranteed to be completely effective against *Cryptosporidium*. However, hydrogen peroxide is more effective than standard bleach solutions.

**Note: Do not mix hydrogen peroxide and bleach solutions. The two chemicals may react violently.** In certain situations (for example, if an outbreak is caused by two or more types of germs), the health department may instruct you or a childcare facility to disinfect surfaces and objects with both hydrogen peroxide and a bleach solution. If so, disinfect with the bleach solution first and thoroughly rinse with water. Then soak with hydrogen peroxide for 20 minutes and thoroughly rinse with water.

**Note:** Hydrogen peroxide breaks down when exposed to sunlight. Store hydrogen peroxide in dedicated opaque containers — never reuse containers for a different chemical.
- OR**
- Commercial disinfectant that is EPA approved**  
FOLLOW MANUFACTURER'S DIRECTIONS.