



## **What I Need to Know About *Cryptosporidium***

### ***What is Cryptosporidium?***

*Cryptosporidium* is a tiny parasite that can live in the bowel of humans and animals. In people with healthy immune systems it usually does not cause any problems. In people with weak immune systems it may cause abdominal cramps and diarrhea.

### ***Where does Cryptosporidium Come From?***

It is usually found in the feces of animals such as cattle. Contamination of water reservoirs with *cryptosporidium* can occur from time to time. *Cryptosporidium* is very resistant to chlorine and it may contaminate treated water for drinking. If this occurs the Public Health Department issues “boiled water” warnings.

### ***What are the symptoms of cryptosporidium infection?***

The symptoms usually include abdominal cramps, and diarrhea. Some people do not have symptoms. In people with weak immune systems the symptoms may be worse.

### ***How long after infection do symptoms appear?***

Symptoms usually begin 2 – 10 days after drinking contaminated water.

### ***How long will symptoms last?***

The symptoms often last about 2 weeks but may come and go for up to 30 days. The symptoms may last longer in people with weakened immune systems.

## ***Who gets cryptosporidium infection?***

Anyone can get it. Persons with severely weakened immune systems are at risk of more serious symptoms. The people who are at highest risk are:

- Those with human immunodeficiency virus infection (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), with CD cell count of less than 200 cells/  $\mu$  l
- People getting cancer chemotherapy
- Organ transplant patients taking immunosuppressant drugs
- Cancer patients taking immunosuppressant drugs
- People with genetically weakened immune systems

## ***How is cryptosporidium diagnosed?***

If you have any symptoms your health care provider will ask you for a stool sample that will be examined using special tests in the laboratory.

## ***How is cryptosporidium infection treated?***

Unfortunately effective treatments do not exist. Fortunately most people with healthy immune systems recover by themselves. People with weakened immune systems may also recover by themselves but it may take longer or they may never recover and have chronic symptoms. Severe illness can be treated with re-hydration under the care of their health care provider.

## ***How is cryptosporidium infection spread?***

It is usually spread by swallowing food, water or anything that has come into contact with stool of a

person or animal with cryptosporidium such as:

- Contaminated water from the tap, swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds or streams contaminated with sewage or feces
- Uncooked food contaminated with cryptosporidium
- Contamination of services (toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails) contaminated with stool from an infected person.

### **How can I prevent infection with *Cryptosporidium*?**

- Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet or changing diapers, and *before eating or preparing food*.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk or milk products
- Do not drink water from lakes, rivers, springs, ponds or streams unless it has been filtered or chemically treated.
- When traveling where the water supply may be unsafe, avoid drinking unboiled tap water and avoid uncooked foods washed with unboiled tap water. Pasteurized fruit drinks are safe to drink, as are steaming hot coffee and tea.
- Avoid swimming in pools if you have *Cryptosporidium* and for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea stops. You can pass *Cryptosporidium* in your stool and contaminate water for several weeks after you no longer have symptoms. *Cryptosporidium* can survive in chlorinated pools for several days.
- Avoid sex that involves contact with stool.

### **What should I do if I have a severely weakened immune system?**

Consult with your health care provider who can help you decide about measures to take to reduce the risk of infections including *Cryptosporidium* infection.

If you decide to drink water which is guaranteed to be free of *Cryptosporidium*, you may use:

- **Boiled water.** Boil water for one minute, put it in a clean bottle and store it in the refrigerator. To be safe, make your ice from the boiled water.
- **Filtered tap water.** Not all filters remove *Cryptosporidium*. Those with the following labels are safe to use:
  - ✓ Tested and certified by NSF Standard 53 for cyst removal
  - ✓ Reverse osmosis
  - ✓ Absolute micron size of one micron or smaller
- **Bottled water.** Not all bottled water is the same. Look for a label that says,
  - ✓ “Reverse osmosis treated”
  - ✓ “Distilled”
  - ✓ “Filtered through an absolute one micron or smaller filter”.

Commercially packaged noncarbonated soft drinks and fruit juices that do not require refrigeration until after they are opened (e.g. those that can be stored unrefrigerated on grocery shelves) also are safe.

Nationally distributed brands of bottled or canned carbonated soft drinks are safe to drink.

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*Cryptosporidium Patient Information*