

# CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS



## **What is cryptosporidiosis?**

Cryptosporidiosis (krip-toe-spo-rid-e-o-sis) is an illness caused by a microscopic parasite *Cryptosporidium parvum*. The disease is often called “crypto.”

## **How is this parasite spread?**

Cryptosporidiosis is spread by eating food contaminated by the feces of an infected person or by ingesting *cryptosporidium* organisms in food obtained from infected animals. Likely means to get infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- Persons who do not wash his/her hands properly after using the restroom or diapering;
- Food that is not washed after being in soil or water that contains *Cryptosporidium*;
- Drinking water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*;
- Swimming or playing in rivers, streams, springs, lakes, swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, and water parks contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*.
- Exposure to wild or domestic animals

## **What are the signs and symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?**

The most common symptom is large amounts of watery diarrhea. There may also be cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever, headache and loss of appetite. Persons with healthy immune systems usually have symptoms for two weeks or less. However, symptoms may last as long as 30 days. During this time, symptoms may come and go. Occasionally, cryptosporidiosis can cause an infection in the gall bladder or the lining of the lung, causing pneumonia. Persons with weak immune systems may have much more severe and long lasting illness. Some persons infected with cryptosporidiosis may not have any symptoms, but they can still pass the parasite to others.

## **What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?**

The symptoms may appear from 1 to 12 days after exposure, but usually within 7 days. The infected person can infect others when symptoms begin and for several weeks after the symptoms disappear. Infected persons who do not have symptoms can still infect others.

## **How can Cryptosporidiosis be prevented?**

Avoid drinking untreated and improperly filtered surface water. Wash hands carefully for at least 30 seconds:

- After use of restroom
- Before preparation of foods
- After completion of food preparation
- After handling animals, especially cattle, or their feces
- After working in soil
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables before eating
- Dispose of sewage waste properly so it does not contaminate surface or ground water.
- If diagnosed with cryptosporidiosis, do not swim in recreational water (swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, etc) for at least two weeks after the diarrhea stops. Even if the water is chlorinated, cryptosporidiosis can still survive.

**What should I do about it?**

Persons who have these symptoms should see their physicians. This is a reportable disease to the Health Department. Children and staff in childcare settings, and health care workers may return to their routine activities after being symptom free for 24 hrs.

For more information, please contact the Santa Rosa County Health Department at 850-983-5200.