



UK Health  
Security  
Agency

## Cryptosporidiosis fact sheet

Cryptosporidiosis is an infection caused by *Cryptosporidium*, a small parasite that cannot be seen without a microscope. These bugs can be found in water, food, soil or on surfaces or dirty hands that have been contaminated with the poo of infected humans or animals.

### What are the symptoms and how long do they last?

Symptoms begin 2 to 10 days (usually 7 days) after being infected and include:

- watery diarrhoea
- stomach cramps or pain
- feeling sick or vomiting
- fever
- weight loss

Symptoms usually last about 1 to 2 weeks but can last longer. The illness can be more serious in people with weakened immune systems. Some people will have no symptoms at all.

### Do you need to stay off work, school or nursery?

Yes, you should not return to work or school or nursery until you have not had any symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting for 48 hours.

You should tell your employer you have had Cryptosporidiosis if you work with vulnerable groups such as elderly people, children, people in poor health, or if you handle food.

### Using swimming pools and hot tubs

If you have Cryptosporidiosis, do not go swimming or use hot tubs until you have not had diarrhoea for at least 2 weeks (14 days). This will stop people from catching the illness.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone can get Cryptosporidiosis, but it is most common in:

- children aged between 1 year and 5 years old
- people who care for or work with young children
- people working with animals, such as lambs and calves
- hikers and campers who drink untreated water
- people swimming in contaminated water (wild swimming)

## How do you catch it?

Cryptosporidium lives in the gut of infected humans or animals and the infection passes into the person or animal's poo. Poo can continue to carry the infection for a few weeks after symptoms stop.

Cryptosporidiosis can be spread by:

- touching your mouth with contaminated hands – hands that have touched things contaminated by poo from an infected person or animal
- swallowing water contaminated with Cryptosporidium in rivers, lakes or swimming pools – the parasite is not killed by chlorine
- drinking untreated water that is contaminated with Cryptosporidium
- eating raw or undercooked food that is contaminated with Cryptosporidium

## How do you avoid getting ill with Cryptosporidiosis?

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:
  - before preparing and eating food
  - after handling raw food
  - after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
  - after touching pets and other animals, or their poo
  - don't rely on alcohol-based hand gels, as they do not kill Cryptosporidium
- Do not drink untreated water
- Always wash and/or peel fruits and vegetables before eating them
- Avoid swallowing water in lakes, rivers etc, and in swimming pools
- During farm visits, wash your hands after any contact with animals, and only eat in designated areas

### **How can I clean at home to stop the spread of Cryptosporidium?**

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet and help young children to wash their hands
- Clean toilet seats, flush handles, basins and taps after use
- Wash clothes and bedding that has poo or vomit on it separately from other clothes at 60°C or the hottest setting the object can stand
- Wash hands with soap and water after handling soiled clothes or bedding
- Do not share bath water
- Give the person with Cryptosporidiosis a separate towel to use

### **How do you treat Cryptosporidiosis?**

There is no particular treatment for this illness. Most people will recover within a month (4 weeks). It is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or sickness can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. If you feel sick, try taking small sips of fluid, often. Avoid tea, coffee, fizzy drinks and alcohol. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution, which you can get from your local pharmacy.