

Cryptosporidiosis

What is it?

Cryptosporidiosis is caused by cryptosporidium parvum which lives in the intestines of people, birds and animals. It produces cysts (eggs) that can survive in the environment for a long time. When a person, bird or animal is infected they pass out the cysts (eggs) in their faeces (poo).

How do you know if you have it?

It usually takes 7 days (sometimes from 1 to 12) for symptoms to show after you have been infected. The symptoms are watery diarrhoea and stomach cramps. Lack of appetite, weight loss, fever, nausea and vomiting sometimes occur.

Some people who are infected with cryptosporidium do not have any symptoms but they are still passing out the cysts (eggs) in their bowel motions.

Laboratory tests on a faecal (poo) specimen will confirm if a person has cryptosporidium. The tests can be arranged by a doctor.

How serious is it?

The symptoms are unpleasant but not usually severe or long lasting. A person is normally fully recovered within a month. People who have a weakened immune system, particularly people living with HIV, may develop a more severe prolonged illness.

How long is someone infectious?

A person is infectious as long as the cysts (eggs) are still in their system. This varies from person to person but is usually for several weeks from when the diarrhoea started.

How do you get cryptosporidiosis?

- From swallowing contaminated food or water or sucking contaminated objects (such as toys). Food or objects can be contaminated by someone who does not wash their hands after changing the nappy of an infected child, or when a person who is infected does not wash their hands after going to the toilet.
- From swimming in pools that have been contaminated by infected people.
- From drinking water from rivers, streams, shallow wells or roof rainwater that has been contaminated by infected animals and humans.
- From not washing hands after touching animals.

What about staying away from early childhood centres, school or work?

- Food handlers, early childhood workers, and some healthcare workers must not return to work until they have been free of symptoms for 2 days.
- Children must not return to early childhood centres (this includes kindergartens, playcentres, kohanga reo) or schools until they have been free of symptoms for 2 days.
- Anyone else can go back to work as long as they do not have symptoms.

Can you get it more than once?

Yes it is possible to get cryptosporidium again.

Is there any treatment?

There is no specific treatment, but the doctor may prescribe some medication to relieve the symptoms. People with cryptosporidium usually get better without treatment.

It is always important to drink lots of fluids when you have diarrhoea. This is especially important for children who are more likely to get dehydrated than adults.

Remember

- Always wash and dry hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, changing a child's nappies, before or after preparing any food or touching animals.
- Always filter or boil drinking water from rivers, streams, shallow wells or from the roof. Contact Regional Public Health or the local council if you need more information.
- Food handlers, child care workers, some health care workers and children who attend school or early childhood centres must not return until they have been free of symptoms for 2 days.
- Anyone else can go back to work as long as they do not have symptoms.
- Wash and dry hands thoroughly after having contact with animals.
- People should not go swimming in a pool if they have had diarrhoea in the last 2 weeks

Wash and dry hands frequently and thoroughly.

