

Cryptosporidium

Public Health Information Sheet



Cryptosporidium (also called crypto) is a parasite found in the gut of infected people and animals. It is caused by the cryptosporidium parasite and is passed on in the poo (faeces) of infected humans and animals. People become infected when they swallow the parasites.

How does cryptosporidium spread?

Crypto is spread by hands contaminated with poos during toilet use or nappy changing. From hands it can spread to surfaces, toys, food and water. It can also spread by contact with infected animals, or in shared water such as spas, swimming pools and shared baths.

Note: Alcohol based hand sanitiser does not kill the cryptosporidium bug, or stop the spread of the microscopic crypto cysts. But, washing hands with soap and water is effective.

Symptoms of cryptosporidium

It can take 1 to 12 days (usually 7) for symptoms to show. The most common symptom of crypto infection is smelly, watery diarrhoea and stomach cramps. Sometimes people:

- have a lack of appetite
- experience weight loss
- have a fever
- feel sick (nausea) and throw up (vomit).

In most people, the symptoms will stop within a few days to a week. It is important to keep well hydrated. If symptoms last longer than a week, or you are concerned, contact your healthcare provider, or call Healthline on 0800 611 116.

Some people with crypto have no symptoms. But, they can still pass the eggs (cysts) in their poo.

Symptoms are unpleasant, but they are not usually severe or long lasting.

How do you know if you have it?

Most people do not need to see their healthcare provider to diagnose crypto. If you do see your healthcare provider they may test your poo (faeces) to confirm crypto.

Cryptosporidium is a notifiable disease. This means that healthcare providers or laboratories will inform public health when someone has it. This way, we can monitor how many people are sick and give advice on how to reduce its spread.

Treating cryptosporidium

If you have crypto you will usually get better without treatment. Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to relieve symptoms.

Self care with cryptosporidium

Most people manage tummy bug illnesses at home without the need to see a doctor or take medication.

There are things that you should do to look after yourself and others.

The biggest health risk from crypto is dehydration. Pregnant people, young children, and older people with cryptosporidium symptoms should keep their fluids up.

Avoiding spreading cryptosporidium

The best thing you and your whānau can do to stop the spread of infection is to practise good hand hygiene. This means scrubbing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and drying them thoroughly with a clean towel:

- after using the bathroom, changing nappies, or helping others use the bathroom
- before eating or cooking
- after handling an animal
- after gardening, even if you used gloves
- when caring for someone with diarrhoea.

Other ways to help stop the spread of crypto infection are:

- stay home or keep young tamariki (children) home when you, or they, have an active case of diarrhoea
- do not drink untreated water
- do not swallow pool water
- wash all produce before eating it — peeling the skins will also reduce your risk
- clean surfaces with products that contain hydrogen peroxide
- take young tamariki at the pool to the bathroom frequently
- change children's nappies often
- stay clear of the water if you or your tamariki have diarrhoea — stay out of the water for a full 2 weeks after the diarrhoea subsides

Seeking health advice

People with weakened immune systems who have crypto symptoms should also keep their fluids up. If you are worried contact:

- Healthline on 0800 611 116
- your medical provider if you are under specialist care
- your healthcare provider.

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For more information

For health advice contact your doctor. You can also call Healthline for free anytime on 0800 611 116. Healthline has interpreters for those who need one.

For more information on cryptosporidium visit: info.health.nz/conditions-treatments/infectious-diseases/cryptosporidium



Need more help?

You can call **Healthline** for free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on **0800 611 116**.

Talk to your pharmacist, hauora Māori provider, Pacific health clinic or doctor.