

Cryptosporidium

What is Cryptosporidium?

Cryptosporidium is a one-celled parasite that can cause a gastrointestinal illness called cryptosporidiosis.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis and when do they appear?

Diarrhea, abdominal cramps, headaches, nausea, vomiting and a low-grade fever. These symptoms can last for weeks and may result in weight loss and dehydration. Symptoms are more severe for people with weakened immune systems and can lead to death. Symptoms can appear from two to 12 days after ingestion. The average is seven days.

How is it spread?

A person can be infected by consuming contaminated water or food. Direct or hand-to-mouth transfer of the parasite from human or animal feces can also cause infection. Streams or lakes may be contaminated by animal feces and infect swimmers or hikers drinking untreated water.

Who is at risk?

Anyone exposed to feces is at risk. This include those drinking contaminated water while camping or traveling, child care workers, young children who attend child care centers, persons exposed to human feces by sexual contact, and caregivers who might come in contact with feces while caring for a person infected with cryptosporidiosis. Farm animals and farm products (unpasteurized apple cider) have caused exposures. Children are especially susceptible because they put so many things into their mouths.

What is the treatment?

If you think you may have cryptosporidiosis, see a health care provider, especially if you have a weakened immune system. For people with healthy immune systems, most recover without treatment; however, treatment is available that may reduce symptoms.