

About...Cryptosporidiosis

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis (krip-toe-spo-rid-e-OH-sis) is a contagious disease caused by a one-celled parasite, *Cryptosporidium parvum*, which can live in the intestine of humans, cattle and other mammals, poultry, fish, and reptiles. Healthy people recover on their own, but cryptosporidiosis can be very serious and even cause death in people with weakened immune systems. Because the parasite is protected by an outer shell (cyst), it can survive outside the body and in the environment for long periods of time. Concentrations of chlorine used in routine water treatment do not kill *Cryptosporidium* cysts. On average, 80 cases of cryptosporidiosis are reported in Indiana each year.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

Cryptosporidium is passed in the stool, and people become infected by ingesting feces from an infected animal or person (fecal-oral route).

There are many ways to become infected with *Cryptosporidium*:

- Eating food, most commonly produce, contaminated with stool from infected animals or contaminated water.
- Swallowing contaminated water from lakes, rivers, streams, swimming pools, or hot tubs.
- Swallowing treated but unfiltered drinking or recreational water.
- Having contact with an infected person's stool:
 - Not washing hands after contact with stool from a contaminated surface or diaper/linen and ingesting the bacteria.
 - Having sex that involves contact with stool.

The most common sources of *Cryptosporidium* outbreaks are contaminated drinking water, recreational water parks, pools, lakes, and contaminated beverages.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

- Watery diarrhea (can be several times a day)
- Stomach cramps
- Upset stomach
- Slight fever
- Weight loss
- Vomiting (more common in children)

Symptoms usually begin 7 days (range of 1-12 days) after a person becomes infected. In healthy people, symptoms usually last about 2 weeks or less. However, it is common for symptoms to fade and then return. This relapse of illness can continue for up to 30 days.

Some people with cryptosporidiosis may not have any symptoms, but they can still pass the disease to others. After infection, people can shed *Cryptosporidium* in their stool for months. People with weakened immune systems may not be able to clear the infection. This may lead to prolonged disease and even death. Being infected with *Cryptosporidium* and recovering from the infection does not provide any immunity against reinfection.

How do I know if I have cryptosporidiosis?

A person with diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours should consult a health care provider. The health care provider may collect a stool sample to test for *Cryptosporidium*.

How is cryptosporidiosis treated?

An antiparasitic drug is an effective treatment and needs to be prescribed by a health care provider. Also, there are over-the-counter medications that can ease the symptoms. Since diarrhea can cause dehydration, an infected person should drink plenty of fluids.

Is cryptosporidiosis a reportable disease?

Yes. Health care providers or laboratories must report cases of cryptosporidiosis to the local health department (LHD) or the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) within 72 hours of diagnosis. The LHD will contact all cases diagnosed with *Cryptosporidium* to determine a possible exposure and help prevent others from becoming ill.

How can cryptosporidiosis be prevented?

In general, cryptosporidiosis can be prevented by strictly adhering to the following guidelines:

- Practice good hygiene:
 - Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom; after assisting someone with diarrhea and/or vomiting; after contact with animals and reptiles; after swimming; before, during, and after food preparation; and after exposure to raw meat products (please refer to [Quick Facts about Hand Washing](#)).
 - Clean food preparation work surfaces, equipment, and utensils with soap and water before, during, and after food preparation, especially after contamination with raw meat products.
- Separate raw and cooked foods:
 - Avoid cross-contamination by keeping uncooked meat products and marinades separate from produce, ready-to-eat foods, and cooked foods.
 - Use separate equipment and utensils to handle raw foods.
- Eat safe foods and drink safe water (Remember: Contaminated foods may look and smell normal):
 - Do not consume unpasteurized dairy products or juices.
 - Wash all produce before cooking or eating raw.
 - Use treated chlorinated water for washing, cooking, and drinking.
 - Avoid swallowing water when in recreational water.
 - Test your well if:
 - Members of your family or others who use the same water are becoming ill,
 - The well is located at the bottom of a hill or it is considered shallow, or
 - The well is in a rural area where animals graze.
- Protect others:
 - Persons with diarrhea and/or vomiting should not prepare food or provide health care services for others and should limit direct contact with others as much as possible.
 - Persons with diarrhea and/or vomiting should not attend a day care facility or school.
 - Persons with diarrhea and/or vomiting shall be excluded from employment involving food handling (Indiana Retail Food Establishment Sanitation Requirements, 410 IAC 7-24-122).
 - Do not change diapers near recreational water.
 - Do not go swimming or use hot tubs if you have diarrhea and for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea stops.
- Handle animals safely:
 - Wash hands after contact with livestock, petting zoos, pets (including reptiles), especially if they are suffering from diarrhea, and after contact with pet food/treats (including live or frozen rodents).
 - Keep pets out of food-preparation areas.
 - Do not clean pet or reptile cages in the kitchen sink or in the bathtub.
 - Have pets checked for parasites by your veterinarian, especially if they have diarrhea.
 - Reptile safety:
 - Reptiles should not be allowed to roam the house.
 - Reptiles should not be kept in day care facilities or classrooms.

- Children under 5 years of age, pregnant women, and persons with weakened immune systems should not handle reptiles.
- Safe travel outside of the United States:
 - Drink bottled beverages and water, even when brushing teeth.
 - Do not eat uncooked fruits or vegetables unless you peel them yourself.
 - Do not eat foods or beverages from street vendors.
 - Do not consume local water or ice.

Where can I find more information on cryptosporidiosis?

To search Indiana data and statistics:

www.in.gov/isdh/dataandstats/disease/diseases_index.htm

To search disease information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/Cryptosporidiumsporidiosis/default.htm>

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/chap24.html>

To search for national data, statistics, and outbreaks:

www.cdc.gov/mmwr/

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