
What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a parasite infection of animals, which can be passed to humans. It is a fairly common disease in man and in domestic animals such as sheep and cattle.

Most cases occur in children under the age of 15. The disease is commonest in spring and late autumn. Cryptosporidiosis is also a common cause of "travellers diarrhoea".

What are the symptoms?

The time taken from picking up *Cryptosporidium* to becoming ill is between 1 & 12 days but commonly 1 week. Illness (symptoms) usually takes the form of:

- ❖ Smelly diarrhoea – sometimes with mucous but rarely with blood
- ❖ Abdominal (tummy) pain
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Nausea (feeling sick) and/or vomiting
- ❖ General tiredness & headache
- ❖ Weight loss & loss of appetite

Symptoms can sometimes last for up to 5 – 6 weeks. It can be longer where the immune system is not fully working.

How does it spread?

- ❖ By drinking untreated water. Swimming pool outbreaks can occur when water has been contaminated and the pool is not properly cleaned
- ❖ By drinking raw milk
- ❖ Not washing hands properly after direct contact with pets and farm animals. Young animals can carry large numbers of the parasite
- ❖ Person to person. This is seen more within families and sexual partners. Outbreaks often take place in nurseries

Can it be prevented?

The risk of spreading *Cryptosporidium* will be reduced if you practice the following:

1. Wash carefully all of the hands

after

- ❖ handling animals
- ❖ changing nappies
- ❖ visiting the toilet

and before

- ❖ cooking
- ❖ handling food
- ❖ feeding the young or elderly
- ❖ eating

2. Drink only treated water

Avoid drinking untreated water from rivers and streams as well as unchecked private water supplies. During periods of heavy rainfall and during lambing or calving the risk is considerably increased.

A private water supply ought to be well maintained and animals should not be allowed to contaminate it. Dirty brown water after heavy rainfall should be boiled before drinking or another water source used.

All public water supplies in Scotland are monitored and Scottish Water must inform the relevant Health Board of any detections.

The Environmental Health Officer or Department of Public Health can offer advice if concerned about a water supply.

3. Practice strict food hygiene

- ❖ Avoid 'raw' dairy products. Unpasteurised milk carries greatest risk
- ❖ Thoroughly wash all salad vegetables

4. Care in leisure and play activities

- ❖ Wash hands properly and wear protective clothing and boots when visiting a farm
- ❖ Children should not use a swimming pool with an upset stomach or diarrhoea

5. Patients with poor immunity

Cryptosporidium can be a serious infection to those with HIV & AIDS as well as other immune problems. They should follow medical advice about how to make water more safe to drink

Will I need treatment?

Generally individuals with Cryptosporidium do not require treatment. Antibiotics do not help. They usually only need to take care to drink plenty water or other clear fluids.

The GP should be contacted if symptoms become severe.

In most cases it is generally advised to wait until 48 hours after last having diarrhoea or sickness before returning to work or school/nursery.

Is there anything else?

This infection can only be controlled if we better understand how it was passed on. This may help to stop others getting infected. Your help with this is important.

A nurse or doctor from the Public Health Department or an Environmental Health Officer will be in touch to find out more information about the time leading up to the illness. They will want to know about who else may be at risk.

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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