

## Cryptosporidiosis

### What is Cryptosporidiosis?

- Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrhoeal disease caused by the parasite *Cryptosporidium*, which infects the intestine.
- *Cryptosporidium* infections have been reported in humans and in a variety of farm, pet and native animals.
- Although there are several species of *Cryptosporidium*, only one species, *Cryptosporidium parvum*, is thought to cause infection in humans.
- Cryptosporidiosis has been notifiable to the NSW Health Department since 1996. The number of cases in NSW tends to increase in the warmer months.

### How is it spread?

- The *Cryptosporidium* organism is present in the faecal matter of infected humans and animals and is spread by the faecal-oral route.
- The disease is passed on when the parasite is ingested.
- Transmission most often occurs through:
  - person-to-person contact, particularly in families and among small children (for example, in child care centres)
  - drinking contaminated water
  - swimming in contaminated pools
  - food (in rare cases)
  - handling infected animals
  - sexual activity that involves contact with faeces.
- A person is most infectious when they have diarrhoea, but the parasite may be excreted for several weeks after symptoms disappear.

### What are the symptoms?

- The most common symptoms of cryptosporidiosis are watery diarrhoea, stomach cramps, fever, nausea and vomiting. These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration.
- The first signs of the illness appear between 1–12 days (average seven days) after a person becomes infected.
- In some cases there may be no symptoms at all. However, these people may still pass the disease on to others.
- Most healthy people recover in less than two weeks.
- People with a weak immune system may have more severe symptoms that can last for many weeks.

### What is the diagnosis and treatment?

- If you have diarrhoea, the only way to tell if it is due to cryptosporidiosis is by going to a doctor and having a stool specimen taken.

- It is important for people with diarrhoea to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- There is no specific treatment for cryptosporidiosis.

### How is it prevented?

To avoid catching cryptosporidiosis:

- always wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after using the toilet, handling animals, changing nappies, or working in the garden, and before preparing food and drinks
- do not drink untreated water (for example, from rivers, streams, lakes and dams). Boiling water from these sources for one minute will kill germs including cryptosporidiosis.

To avoid spreading cryptosporidiosis:

- keep small children who have diarrhoea home from school, preschool, childcare or playgroups until the diarrhoea has completely stopped
- food handlers, childcare workers and health care workers with cryptosporidiosis should not work until diarrhoea has stopped
- for at least one week after the diarrhoea has stopped, do not: -use swimming pools or other water recreational areas -share linen and towels with others.

### Further information - Public Health Units in NSW

For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre – see under ‘NSW Government’ at the front of the White Pages.

#### Metropolitan Areas

Central Sydney	9515 3180
South Eastern Sydney	9382 8333
Northern Sydney	9477 9400
South Western Sydney	9828 5944
Western Sydney	9840 3603
Wentworth	4734 2022

#### Rural Areas

Central Coast	4349 4845
Mid North Coast	6588 2750
Mid Western	6339 5548
Hunter	4924 6477
Illawarra	4255 2200
New England	6766 2288
Northern Rivers	6620 7500
Macquarie	6841 2216
Southern	4827 3428
Greater Murray	6021 4799
Far West	(08) 8080 1499

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