

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is an infectious diarrhoeal illness caused by an 'egg' (oocyst) - forming parasite (germ) called Cryptosporidium.

Where does it come from?

Cryptosporidium can infect both humans and animals. It can cause diarrhoea in very young animals including calves, lambs and deer, mostly during springtime, as well as in humans of all ages at any time of the year. Any infected animal or person may pass a large number of parasite oocysts in their droppings, especially if the infection is causing them to have diarrhoea.

How does it spread?

Swallowing just a few parasite oocysts may be enough to cause infection. The infection may spread :

- *From contaminated water - for instance droppings from an infected animal may contaminate a water supply (both private and public). The germ survives in chlorinated water and where the water treatment system is unfiltered, it can pass into the drinking water supply. The risk of water contamination is high following heavy rainfall, especially in spring and particularly if this coincides with lambing or calving.*
- *Swimming pool water may also be contaminated by an infected swimmer and infect other swimmers.*
- *From direct contact with infected farm animals (even if they do not appear ill). During visits to farms and wildlife parks, where children are often encouraged to touch young animals such as calves and lambs.*

- *Through touching objects e.g. boots or clothes contaminated with the germ, without washing hands afterwards.*
- *Through not washing hands before eating and after using the toilet, particularly after being in the presence of animals.*
- *From someone who is infected, especially if they have vomiting and diarrhoea. The illness spreads more easily among children because they are less likely to wash their hands after using the toilet.*

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually develop between 1 to 12 days after contact with the germ. These may include:

Loss of appetite

Nausea

Vomiting (especially in children)

Fever, usually mild

Stomach cramps

*Diarrhoea - watery and foul smelling.
Can be severe and prolonged.*

Can I prevent infection?

The following steps can reduce the risk of contracting or spreading cryptosporidium:

1. Always wash your hands.

Regular, thorough hand washing is essential and should be done

Before:

- *Food handling & cooking*
- *Eating*
- *Feeding young children, the elderly or ill individuals*
- *Departing a farm or wildlife park even if there is no contact with animals.*

and After:

- *Using the toilet*
- *Handling animals*
- *Handling raw meat or poultry*
- *Changing nappies.*

2. Don't drink untreated water from rivers and streams.

3. Avoid unpasteurised milk or dairy products.

4. Always ensure that food is thoroughly cooked. Boiling destroys the parasite.

5. Wash salad items and other food to be eaten raw.

6. Always wear protective clothing and boots when dealing with farm animals and remove them before washing your hands and entering the family home.

7. Children should not use a swimming pool if they have an upset tummy or diarrhoea to avoid spreading the infection to other swimmers. Avoid swimming pools until diarrhoea has ceased for 2 weeks.

Patients with poor immunity

Patients with poor immunity may be advised by their doctor not to drink unboiled tap water because if it is infected, the symptoms may be prolonged or life threatening. This advice is more relevant in the spring and early summer when mains tap water may be contaminated by this parasite. People who have an impaired immune response, whether congenital or acquired due to illness or drug treatment should never drink unboiled tap water. If you are unsure whether your condition merits this advice, you should check with your doctor.

Bringing the water to the boil is adequate to destroy the parasite. Prolonged boiling is not necessary. To avoid scald injuries it is advisable to boil a full kettle last thing at night, allow to cool overnight and then store in the fridge until required.

Bottled water varies in its risk of being contaminated with the parasite, though so far there are no reports of Cryptosporidium in bottled water causing illness in the UK.

Will I need treatment?

Antibiotics do not help cure this infection. If you do become infected, remember to drink plenty of fluids. Cryptosporidium can cause the body to lose water through vomiting and diarrhoea. Adequate fluid intake will replace the lost water and prevent dehydration.

If symptoms become severe, you should contact your GP for further advice.

When can I return to Work ?

No exclusion is necessary for any group of people. Just be sure that the diarrhoea has stopped for at least 48 hours and remember to maintain adequate hygiene standards.

If you suspect you have contracted Cryptosporidiosis you will need to provide a stool specimen to confirm this, in which case you should contact your General Practitioner (GP).

If you would simply like more information contact either your GP or the Public Health Protection Unit at Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Board.

Tel : 0141-201-4917

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PATIENT INFORMATION

