

---

---

# Cryptosporidiosis

## What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by microscopic parasites, *Cryptosporidium*, that can live in the intestine of humans and animals and is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal. Both the disease and the parasite are commonly known as “crypto.” The parasite is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time and makes it very resistant to chlorine-based disinfectants. During the past 2 decades, crypto has become recognized as one of the most common causes of waterborne disease (recreational water and drinking water) in humans in the United States.

## How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

*Cryptosporidium* lives in the intestines of infected humans or animals. An infected person or animal sheds crypto parasites in their stool. Shedding of crypto begins when the symptoms begin and can last for weeks after symptoms (e.g., diarrhea) stop. You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite. *Cryptosporidium* may be found in soil, food, water or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces of infected humans or animals. Crypto is not spread by contact with blood.

## How can the spread of cryptosporidiosis be prevented?

As with preventing many illnesses, good hygiene is crucial. Take the following steps to

prevent cryptosporidiosis and many other infectious diseases:

- Wash your hands frequently, especially after changing diapers, after using the bathroom, and before eating or preparing any food.
- Do not swallow recreational water, such as water in swimming pools, Jacuzzis, hot tubs, fountains, lakes, rivers, ponds, or streams.
- Do not share food, beverages, utensils, cups, or water bottles.
- Thoroughly wash with uncontaminated water all vegetables and fruit you plan to eat raw.
- Always wash hands after coming into contact with animals

## Where and how does crypto get into drinking water?

Crypto is found in every part of the United States and throughout the world. Millions of cryptosporidia can be released in one bowel movement from an infected human or animal. Crypto may be found in water sources such as private wells that have been contaminated with feces from infected humans or animals. Water can be contaminated through sewage overflows, polluted storm water runoff, agricultural runoff, etc.

## What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis is watery diarrhea. Other symptoms include:

- Stomach cramps or pain

- Dehydration
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Weight loss

### **How long after infection do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms of cryptosporidiosis generally begin 2 to 10 days (average 7 days) after becoming infected with the parasites.

### **How long will symptoms last?**

In people with healthy immune systems, symptoms usually last about 1 to 2 weeks. The symptoms may go in cycles in which you may seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse again before the illness ends.

### **Who is most at risk for cryptosporidiosis?**

People who are most likely to become infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- Children who attend childcare centers, including diaper-aged children
- Childcare workers
- Parents of infected children
- People who take care of other people with cryptosporidiosis
- International travelers
- Backpackers, hikers, and campers who drink unfiltered, untreated water
- People who drink from untreated, shallow, unprotected wells
- People, including swimmers, who swallow water from contaminated sources
- People who handled infected animals, such as cattle
- People exposed to human feces through sexual contact

### **What should I do if I think I have crypto?**

Contact your healthcare provider to discuss your concerns.

### **How is crypto infection diagnosed?**

Laboratory tests can help identify crypto as the cause of illness. These tests identify the parasite in the stools of an infected person. The tests are usually not performed unless the laboratory is instructed specifically to look for the organism. Because testing for crypto can be difficult, you may be asked to submit several stool samples over several days.

### **How is crypto treated?**

There is no effective treatment for crypto. Most people with a healthy immune system will recover on their own. If you have diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea can be life-threatening in babies.

### **How do I remove crypto from drinking water?**

Bleach (chlorine) does not kill Crypto. Fully boiling your water for 1 minute (3 minutes if you live at a high altitude) will kill or inactivate crypto. Water should then be stored in a clean container with a lid and refrigerated. An alternative to boiling water is using a point-of-use filter. Not all home water filters remove crypto. Filters that are designed to remove crypto should have one of the following labels:

- Reverse osmosis,
- Absolute pore size of 1 micron (µm) or smaller,
- Tested and certified by NSF Standard 53 for cyst removal, or
- Tested and certified by NSF Standard 53 for cyst reduction.

**For specific concerns about cryptosporidiosis illness, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or the NH Department of Health and Human Services website at [www.dhhs.nh.gov](http://www.dhhs.nh.gov) .**