

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 Department of Health 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.

For further information please contact your local Public Health Unit, Community Health Centre, or doctor.

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