

## CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

### What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis (often known as Crypto) is a disease caused by a microscopic parasite (germ), which if swallowed can cause diarrhoea. Crypto is most common in children aged one to five years and young adults.

### What are the symptoms of Crypto?

Symptoms can take up to 10 days to develop but the average is three to five days.

The most common symptoms are:

- Severe watery diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Weight loss

Symptoms normally last for one to three weeks. Some people can carry the organism but not show any symptoms. The illness is generally mild but can be more serious and prolonged for people who have problems with their immune system.

### Where does Crypto come from?

Crypto occurs naturally in the guts of farm and domestic animals and is passed on through their manure, which may contaminate fields, rivers and vegetable crops. Higher levels of crypto are more common in the spring particularly during periods of heavy rain when the germs are washed into the ground and into rivers and lakes.

### How do I catch Crypto?

- Crypto can be spread easily from person to person. This can happen if there is inadequate hand washing after using the toilet or changing nappies. You can also pick up Crypto from surfaces such as toys, changing tables or bathroom surfaces contaminated by an infected person.
- Generally, drinking water in the UK is safe but supplies, very occasionally, can become contaminated.
- Swimming in or swallowing contaminated water can cause infection. Recreational use of rivers, lakes and ponds can be a source of contamination if the water is swallowed. Swimmers who are infected with Crypto can contaminate swimming and paddling pools. Unfortunately the disinfectant used in swimming and paddling pools does not kill Crypto.
- Farm animals and pets can carry Crypto and spread the illness directly to humans.
- Fruit and vegetables can become contaminated from a polluted water source or from contact with manure. Infected cows may contaminate their raw milk. Raw milk is sometimes sold or used on farms and should be avoided.

### How will I know if I have Crypto?

If you are ill with diarrhoea you should visit your doctor who may arrange for a stool specimen to be taken. This will be tested in a laboratory. The result may take a few days.

## **How can I avoid Crypto?**

- Always wash your hands using soap and hot water and dry them thoroughly before eating or preparing food, after using the lavatory or changing nappies and after contact with domestic or farm animals.
- Take care when swimming in untreated waters e.g. ponds and rivers. Try not to swallow the water.
- Never drink untreated water. Take particular care on holiday in countries where the water supply may not be chlorinated. If in doubt, boil the water before drinking.
- Wash or peel raw fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Do not drink unpasteurised milk.

## **What Special Care should I take if I have Crypto?**

- Take particular care with your personal hygiene. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet. Make sure you use a separate towel and flannel from the rest of the family. Take particular care when changing the nappies of children who are ill.
- Avoid preparing and handling food for other people while you are ill.
- Do not go swimming or take your child swimming while suffering from diarrhoea or for two weeks after the diarrhoea has stopped. You can pass Crypto in your stools for several weeks even if you no longer have symptoms.

## **How long should I stay away from work, school or nursery?**

- Most adults and children over five years should stay away from work until they are feeling better.
- People working with food must stay off work until they have been symptom free for two days. You must tell your employer about your illness.
- People working with vulnerable groups e.g. the young, elderly or those in poor health must stay off work until they have been symptom free for two days. You must tell your employer about your illness.
- Young children should stay away from playgroups, childminders or nursery school until they have been symptom free for two days.

## **Who cares if I have Crypto?**

Your GP and your local Environmental Health Officer care.

Your GP will give you advice about the medical aspects of Crypto. Your local Environmental Health Officer may also contact you and offer advice and ask some questions to try to find out where the illness has come from.

### **For further information and advice, please contact:**

**Department: Environmental Health Department**

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