

## **CRYPTOSPORIDIUM**

### **What is Cryptosporidium**

Cryptosporidium is a parasite (a tiny organism) that causes an infection called cryptosporidiosis affecting people and farm animals. Cryptosporidium is found in lakes, streams and rivers, untreated drinking water and sometimes in swimming pools.

### **Who is at risk?**

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis, but it is most common in children aged between one and five years. People who care for, or work with children are more at risk than others. For most people, the illness is unpleasant but self-limiting. However, it can be a serious illness in people who have immune systems that are not working properly. Please let the person giving you these advice notes know about any other illnesses/conditions you have and any medication you are currently taking.

### **How do you get cryptosporidiosis?**

You can get cryptosporidiosis directly from another person or animal by touching faeces, (for example when changing a nappy) and putting your hands near or in your mouth without washing them thoroughly. You can also get cryptosporidiosis from infected animals or by swimming in, or drinking contaminated water. Occasionally you can be infected by eating and drinking contaminated food, particularly unpasteurised milk, under cook meat and offal (liver, kidneys, and heart).

### **How can you avoid getting cryptosporidiosis?**

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

- before preparing and eating food
- after handling raw food
- after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
- after working, feeding, grooming or playing with pets and other animals.
- Do not drink untreated water.
- Do not use ice or drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe
- Always wash and/or peel fruits and vegetables before eating them.

### **How can you avoid spreading cryptosporidiosis?**

- Do not go swimming if you have diarrhoea.
- If you have had cryptosporidiosis do not go swimming until you have been clear of diarrhoea for at least two weeks.
- Avoid swallowing water in lakes and swimming pools.

- You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals, and eating only in designated areas.
- Cryptosporidiosis is highly infectious so you need to be scrupulously clean around your home. Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use.
- Make sure all members of your household wash their hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet and after handling soiled clothing or bedding
- Make sure that everyone has their own towel and that they do not use anybody else's. Wash all soiled clothes and linen on as hot a machine wash as possible.

### **What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis and how long do they last?**

The most common symptoms are watery diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pains, and fever which may only last a couple of days, but which can continue for up to three or four weeks. It can affect people with weak immune systems for much longer. You might think that you are getting better and have shaken off the infection but then find that you get worse before the illness eventually goes. Dehydration and weight loss are less common, but can occur if your body is unable to take in enough nutrients and water from your food, for example if the vomiting or diarrhoea is very severe or continues for a long time. As symptoms are similar to many other infections, the only way to make an accurate diagnosis is for a sample of your faeces to be tested in a laboratory.

### **How do you treat cryptosporidiosis?**

There is no specific treatment for cryptosporidiosis. Most people with a healthy immune system will recover within one month.

- It is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution, available from your pharmacist. If you feel sick, try taking small sips of fluid, frequently.
- Avoid alcohol
- A simple painkiller can help with abdominal cramps. Talk to your GP or pharmacist who can advise you on the most appropriate painkiller for you.

### **Do I need to stay off work or school?**

Yes. While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You should not return to work or school until you have been free from diarrhoea and/or vomiting for 48 hours.

You should tell your employer you have had cryptosporidiosis if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if you handle food.

For further advice or If you have concerns about your health contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or NHS Direct Wales 0845 4647, visit their websites <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk> or <http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk>, or see your family doctor. For further advice on food poisoning, contact your local Environmental Health Department at Torfaen County Borough Council on 01633 762200. Alternatively visit our website – [www.torfaen.gov.uk](http://www.torfaen.gov.uk) .