

# Cryptosporidiosis

## What is cryptosporidiosis and what causes it?

Cryptosporidiosis (KRIP-toe-spo-rid-ee-OH-sis) is a diarrheal disease caused by the protozoa, *Cryptosporidium*. The disease can affect most animals, including humans, and usually causes mild diarrhea, but can be severe in young or weak animals.

## What animals get cryptosporidiosis?

All mammals, especially young animals, can get cryptosporidiosis. Calves and lambs are most often affected. Birds, fish and rabbits can also be infected. Dogs, cats and horses rarely get this disease.

## How can my animal get cryptosporidiosis?

Infected people and animals shed the protozoa in their feces; this contaminates the environment. *Cryptosporidium* can survive up to 2 to 6 months in damp environments. The organism can be **ingested** in contaminated food or water or by contacting or licking contaminated non-living objects (**fomites**). It is also possible to inhale (**aerosol**) the organism, but this is very rare.

## How does cryptosporidiosis affect my animal?

In animals, illness begins a few days after being infected. Young animals become ill most commonly and will have diarrhea, poor appetite, and weight loss. While the disease is usually mild, it can become serious or even fatal. Many animals can carry *Cryptosporidium* organisms without showing signs of illness.

## Can I get cryptosporidiosis?

Yes. People become infected by accidentally **ingesting** contaminated water (e.g., lakes, streams, swimming pools, hot tubs), eating contaminated food or by contact with objects contaminated with feces or unwashed hands (**fomites**). A rare form of the disease affects the lungs following inhalation (**aerosol**) of the organism.

Symptoms develop about one week after exposure. Most people who become infected never get sick. If disease does occur it may include watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea and a poor appetite. Vomiting, fever, and muscle aches may also occur. Young children and pregnant women are particularly susceptible to dehydration.

If you are ill with cryptosporidiosis, you can pass the organism to others in your feces. Infected people will continue shedding organisms for a few weeks after recovering, so avoid swimming in public areas during this time.



**Cryptosporidiosis is also called "crypto". The protozoa is commonly found in contaminated water sources.**

## Who should I contact, if I suspect cryptosporidiosis?

**In Animals** – Contact your veterinarian immediately.

**In Humans** – Contact your physician immediately.

## How can I protect my animal from cryptosporidiosis?

*Cryptosporidium* organisms are common in the environment and are carried by many animals without symptoms. The protozoa are resistant to many disinfectants. Chlorine does not effectively kill the organism. Therefore, it is hard to completely protect your animal.

Keep sick animals away from those that are healthy. Clean and disinfect areas where animals have been ill or had diarrhea. Provide good nutrition and keep your animals healthy to minimize the risk and consequences of infection.

## How can I protect myself from cryptosporidiosis?

Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently especially after using the toilet, touching animals and before handling or eating food. Wash all raw fruits or vegetables well before eating them. Do not drink (or swallow) water from lakes, streams, hot tubs or pools. Do not swim in public areas if you have or recently had diarrhea.

## For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets.

Cryptosporidiosis at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/>

CDC website. Cryptosporidiosis at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/cryptosporidiosis/>