Cryptosporidiosis, Crypto
Diarrhea caused by Parasite

Cryptosporidiosis is a gastrointestinal illness caused by the parasite Cryptosporidiosis. It is usually called Crypto. You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite. Crypto may be found in soil, food, and water. It can also be found on, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals. Usually you begin having problems about 2 to 10 days (average 7 days) after becoming infected. The small intestine is the site most commonly affected. However, it can infect other areas of the digestive tract or respiratory tract.

Crypto parasites are found throughout the world. Travelers to developing countries may be at greater risk for infection because of poorer water treatment and food sanitation.

People with weakened immune systems may develop serious, chronic, and sometimes fatal illness. Examples of people with weakened immune systems include:

- People with AIDS.
- Those with inherited diseases that affect the immune system.
- Cancer and transplant patients who are taking certain immunosuppressive drugs.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms usually last about 1 to 2 weeks in persons with healthy immune systems. Occasionally, people may experience a recurrence of symptoms after a brief period of recovery before the illness ends. Symptoms can come and go for up to a month.

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

- Stomach cramps or pain.
- Dehydration.
- Nausea.
- Vomiting.
- Fever.
- Weight loss.

Some people with Crypto will have no symptoms at all.

RISK FACTORS

Crypto lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite. An infected person or animal sheds Cryptosporidium parasites in the stool. Millions of Crypto parasites can be released in a bowel movement from an infected human or animal. Shedding begins when the symptoms begin. Shedding and can last for weeks after the symptoms (e.g., diarrhea) stops. Crypto is not spread by contact with blood. Crypto can be spread by:

- Putting something in your mouth or accidentally swallowing something that has come in contact with the stool of a person or animal infected with Crypto.
- Swallowing water or beverages contaminated by stool from infected humans or animals.
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with Crypto. All fruits and vegetables you plan to eat raw should be thoroughly washed with uncontaminated water.
- By touching your mouth with contaminated hands. Hands can become contaminated through a variety of activities, such as:
    - Touching surfaces (e.g., toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails) that have been contaminated by stool from an infected person.
    - Changing diapers.
    - Caring for an infected person.

- Handling an infected cow or calf.
- Hikers who drink from unfiltered, untreated water sources. They are at higher risk for Crypto infection.

People with greater exposure to contaminated materials are more at risk for infection, such as:

- Children who attend day care centers, including diaper-aged children.
- Child care workers.
- Parents of infected children children.
- People who take care of other people with Crypto.
- International travelers 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 handle infected cattle.
- People exposed to human feces through sexual contact contact.

Several community-wide outbreaks of Crypto have been linked to drinking municipal water or recreational water contaminated with Cryptosporidium.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis of Cryptocryptosporidiosis is made by examination of stool samples. Because detection of Cryptosporidium can be difficult, you may be asked to submit several stool samples over several days.

TREATMENT

- Most people who have healthy immune systems recover without treatment. Diarrhea can be managed by drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. People who are in poor health or who have weakened immune systems are at higher risk for worse and longer illness. Young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to dehydration from diarrhea. They should drink plenty of fluids while ill. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea may be especially life threatening to babies. Parents should talk to their health care providers about fluid replacement therapy options for infants.
- Anti-diarrheal medicine may help slow down diarrhea. , Abut a health care provider should be consulted before such medicine is taken.
- HIV-positive individuals who suspect they have Crypto should contact their health care provider. For those persons with AIDS, anti-retroviral therapy that improves the immune status will also decrease or eliminate symptoms of Crypto. However, even if symptoms disappear, Crypto is often not curable and the symptoms may return if the immune status worsens.

PREVENTION

Crypto can be very contagious. Infected individuals should follow these guidelines to avoid spreading the disease to others:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water. Especially:
  - After using the toilet.
  - After changing diapers.
  - Before eating or preparing food.
- Do not swim in recreational water if you have Crypto and for at least 2 weeks after the diarrhea stops. You can pass Crypto in your stool and contaminate water for several weeks after your symptoms have ended. You do not even need to have a fecal accident in the water. Infected people may have Crypto on their skin in the anal and genital areas, including thighs and buttocks. Therefore immersion in the water may wash the parasites off the body. As a result of infected people swimming, many outbreaks of Crypto recreational water users have occurred.

Note: You may not be protected in a chlorinated recreational water venue (e.g., swimming pool, wWater pPark, splash pad, spray pad) because Crypto is chlorine-resistant and can live for days in chlorine-treated water.

- Avoid close contact with anyone who has a weakened immune system.

- Exclude children with diarrhea from child care settings until the diarrhea has stopped.

Washing hands is the most effective means of preventing Crypto.

For people with weakened immune systems, sex, including oral sex, which involves possible contact with stool, should be avoided. Immunocompromised individuals should also avoid the stool of all animals. They should and wash their hands thoroughly after any contact with animals or the living areas of animals. Immunocompromised persons may also wish to wash, peel, or cook all vegetables. In addition, they may wish to and to take extra measures, such as boiling or filtering their drinking water , to ensure its safety.

Most of this information is courtesy of the CDC.

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