Cryptosporidium

Cryptosporidium is a parasite that causes watery diarrhea. It can cause diarrhea in anyone; however, people with weakened immune systems can have severe or life-threatening disease. It is also referred to as “Crypto” which is used interchangeably for Cryptosporidium or Cryptococcus. If there is any question regarding the organism for which you have tested positive, contact your healthcare provider.

Sources of Infection: Cryptosporidium parasites are found throughout the United States and around the world.

- The parasite lives in the intestine of infected humans and animals.
- It can be found in soil, food, water or surfaces that have been contaminated with feces (poop) from infected humans or animals.
- You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite (i.e., swallowing contaminated water, eating contaminated raw or undercooked food, touching your mouth with contaminated hands, etc…).

Symptoms:

- Watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever and weight loss
- Symptoms usually begin about 1 week after becoming infected and can last 1-2 weeks. Some people may have a recurrence of symptoms after a brief period of recovery before the illness ends (up to 30 days).
- People with HIV, organ transplants, cancer or on chronic steroids are at risk for more serious infection and should see their doctor if sick

Diagnosis:

- Cryptosporidium can be diagnosed by performing a specific test on stool samples.

Treatment:

- The primary treatment for Cryptosporidium is supportive. See your healthcare provider if ill.
- Individuals that are sick should drink lots of fluids (non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated beverages) to prevent dehydration.
- Please consult a healthcare provider before taking anti-diarrheal medicine.
- Nitazzoxanide is the only FDA-approved treatment of diarrhea caused by Cryptosporidium and is available only by prescription.

Prevention:

- Basic good hand hygiene is critically important in preventing the spread of Cryptosporidium.
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- * Alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not effectively kill Cryptosporidium.*
- Do not swallow the water you swim in or drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, ponds or shallow wells.
- Remove obvious contamination from any surfaces and clean according to manufacturer’s instructions. Wash clothing and bedding with normal detergents in a washer / dryer.
- **IF YOU HAVE BEEN SICK**, please avoid the following activities while you are having symptoms and for at least 2 weeks after your symptoms resolve:
  - Swimming or water activities in ANY type of water (pools, lakes, splash pads, water tables, etc…)
  - Preparing food (for family or at a restaurant)

Where can I find more information?

- Go to cdc.gov and type Cryptosporidium in SEARCH box.