



What Is Cryptosporidium?

Cryptosporidiosis is a gastro-intestinal disease caused by the protozoan parasite – Cryptosporidium Parvum.

What are the symptoms?

- Diarrhoea, which is usually watery and profuse
- Abdominal cramping
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Electrolyte imbalance
- Headaches

Cryptosporidiosis usually resolves itself in a couple weeks. However, in young children, the elderly and people with immune deficiencies – particularly AIDS patients - the disease can be chronic and life threatening.

How does it spread?

Cryptosporidium is spread by the faecal – oral route i.e. person-to-person, animal to person, and by contaminated water and food. It is of increasing public health importance because it is widespread and can be found in lakes and streams.

Prevention

The risk of people contracting Cryptosporidium from drinking water supplies can be eliminated by treatment procedures. This involves installing fine filters and a UV sterilisation unit to remove and kill Cryptosporidium cysts.

Treatment

Prevention is better than cure. Once Cryptosporidium is contracted there is currently no totally effective therapy for eliminating it other than a healthy, intact immune system.

Precautions

1. Hand washing.
2. Water supply - your household water from your Council should be of good quality.
3. Cleaning - around the toilet and bathroom. Don't forget to clean the toilet flush button, the toilet door handle, the area around the door handle, and the bathroom sink tap.
4. Washing - clothing and bed linen used by a patient.
5. Childcare centres - sick children should remain away from childcare centres until cessation of the active symptoms plus a further 14 days.

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6. Swimming pools - the patient should not swim in a public swimming pool for at least two weeks after the active diarrhoea symptoms cease.

For more information contact a Health Protection Officer at Toi Te Ora Public Health Service, free phone 0800 221 555.