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***Cryptosporidium* Infection**

Cryptosporidiosis (KRIP-toe-spo-rid-ee-OH-sis)

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal illness caused by microscopic (tiny) parasites of the genus *Cryptosporidium*. Once an animal or person is infected, the parasite lives in the intestine and passes in the stool. The parasite is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive (live) outside the body for long periods of time. This makes it very resistant to chlorine-based disinfectants. Both the illness and the parasite are commonly known as "crypto." During the past ten years, crypto has become recognized as one of the most common causes of waterborne illness within humans in the United States. The parasite may be found in drinking water and recreational water in every region of the United States and throughout the world.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis is watery diarrhea.

Other symptoms may include:

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

However, some people with crypto will have no symptoms at all. While the small intestine is the site most commonly affected, *Cryptosporidium* infections could possibly affect other areas of the digestive or the respiratory tract.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

Cryptosporidium lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. Millions of crypto parasites can be released in a bowel movement from an infected human or animal. Consequently, *Cryptosporidium* is found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with infected human or animal stool (feces). If a person swallows the parasite they become infected. You **cannot** become infected through contact with blood.

The parasite can be spread by:

- Accidentally putting something into your mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with stool (feces) of a person or animal infected with *Cryptosporidium*.
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium* (recreational water includes water in swimming pools, hot tubs, Jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams that can be contaminated with sewage or feces from humans or animals.)
- Accidentally swallowing *Cryptosporidium* picked up from surfaces (such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) contaminated with stool (feces) from an infected person.

Note: *Cryptosporidium* can survive for days in swimming pools with adequate chlorine levels.

How long does it take to make one sick after becoming infected?

Symptoms of cryptosporidiosis generally begin 2 to 10 days (average 7 days) after becoming infected with the parasite.

How long will symptoms last?

In persons with healthy immune systems, symptoms usually last about 1 to 2 weeks. The symptoms may go in cycles in which you may seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse again before the illness ends. Once diarrhea ceases, the infected person may still pass crypto on to others for 2 weeks.

How does one keep from becoming infected with Crypto?

Follow these general guidelines:

- Thoroughly wash all vegetables and fruits you plan to eat raw with clean, safe water.
- Do not swim when you have diarrhea. This is especially important for kids in diapers.
- Do not swallow pool water.
- Practice good hygiene. Take a shower before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often.
- Change diapers in a bathroom and not at poolside.
- Wash your child (especially the rear end) thoroughly with soap and water before swimming.
- **Do not rely on chemicals** to disinfect water and kill *Cryptosporidium*. Because Crypto has a thick outer shell, this particular parasite is highly resistant to disinfectants such as chlorine and iodine.

What is the treatment for *Crypto*?

A new drug, nitazoxanide (Alinia), has been approved for treatment of diarrhea caused by *Cryptosporidium* in people with healthy immune systems. Consult with your health care provider for more information. Most people who have a healthy immune system will recover without treatment. The symptoms of diarrhea can be treated with over the counter medications. Anti-diarrheal medicine may help slow down diarrhea, but talk to your health care provider before taking it. If you have diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea may be especially life threatening to babies and children; therefore, parents should talk to their health care provider about fluid replacement therapy options for infants.

People who are in poor health or who have a weakened immune system are at higher risk for more severe and more prolonged illness. The effectiveness of nitazoxanide in immunosuppressed individuals is unclear. For persons with AIDS, anti-retroviral therapy that improves immune status will also decrease or eliminate symptoms of Crypto. However, even if symptoms disappear, cryptosporidiosis is usually not curable and the symptoms may return if the immune status worsens. See your health care provider to discuss anti-retroviral therapy used to improve your immune status.

How can I prevent the spread of *Crypto* to others?

Careful hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of Crypto to others. This means thorough hand washing after changing a diaper or going to the bathroom. Food handlers, healthcare workers and daycare workers should not return to the workplace until 24 hours following their last diarrhea stool. If a person has tested positive for Crypto, they should wait until they have 2 negative stools, 24 hours apart.

Where can I get more information?

You can call your physician or any of the Southwest District Health offices listed on this form.