

Will I need treatment?

Antibiotics do not help cure this infection. Cryptosporidium can cause the body to lose water through vomiting and diarrhoea, so you should drink plenty of fluids to replace the lost water and prevent dehydration. If symptoms become severe, you should contact your GP for further advice.

When can I return to work? When can children return to school or child-care?

In order to reduce the risk of spreading infection, you should not return to work, and children should not return to school or childcare until symptom free for 48 hours.

**For further information
please log onto our website:**

<http://www.nhs.org.uk>

***If you are worried that you have contracted Cryptosporidiosis you should contact your General Practitioner (GP), who may ask you to provide a stool sample to confirm the diagnosis. If you would simply like more information contact either your GP or the Public Health Protection Unit at Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Board.
Tel: 0141-201-4917***

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Cryptosporidiosis

Patient information leaflet

Public Health Protection Unit 0141 201 4917

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What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is an infectious diarrhoeal illness caused by an 'egg' (oocyst) - forming parasite (germ) called Cryptosporidium.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually develop between 1 to 12 days after contact with the germ. These may include:

- ◆ **Loss of appetite**
- ◆ **Nausea**
- ◆ **Vomiting (especially in children)**
- ◆ **Fever, usually mild**
- ◆ **Stomach cramps**
- ◆ **Diarrhoea - watery and foul smelling, which can be severe and prolonged.**

How does it spread?

Cryptosporidium can infect both humans and animals. It can cause diarrhoea in very young animals including calves, lambs and deer, mostly during springtime, as well as in humans of all ages at any time of the year. Any infected animal or person may pass a large number of parasite oocysts in their faeces, especially if the infection is causing them to have diarrhoea. Swallowing just a few parasite oocysts may be enough to cause infection. The infection may spread through:

Contaminated drinking water: droppings from an infected animal may contaminate a water supply (private or public). The germ survives in chlorinated water and where the water treatment system is unfiltered, it can pass into the drinking water supply. The risk of water contamination is higher following heavy rainfall, especially in spring and particularly if this coincides with lambing or calving.

Swallowing contaminated recreational waters: Ponds, lakes and rivers may also be contaminated from infected animal droppings, and swimming pool water can become contaminated by an infected swimmer.

Direct contact with infected farm animals (even if they do not appear ill), e.g. during visits to farms and wildlife parks, children are often encouraged to touch young animals such as calves and lambs.

Touching contaminated objects e.g. boots or clothes, without washing hands afterwards.

Contact with someone who is infected, especially if they have vomiting and diarrhoea. The illness spreads more easily among children because they are less likely to wash their hands after using the toilet.

Eating and drinking contaminated food, particularly unpasteurised milk, undercook meat and offal (liver, kidneys, and heart). Fruit and vegetables can become contaminated from a polluted water source or from contact with manure or farm slurry

Risk of infection is generally increased if **not washing hands before eating and after using the toilet**, particularly after being in the presence of animals.

Can I prevent infection?

The following steps can reduce the risk of contracting or spreading cryptosporidium:

1. Always wash your hands.

Regular, thorough hand washing with soap and warm water is essential and should be done

Before:

- Food handling & cooking
- Eating
- Feeding young children, the elderly or ill individuals
- Departing a farm or wildlife park even if there is no contact with animals.

and After:

- Using the toilet
- Handling animals
- Handling raw meat or poultry
- Changing nappies.

2. Don't drink untreated water from rivers and streams.

3. Avoid unpasteurised milk or dairy products.

4. Always ensure that food is thoroughly cooked. Boiling destroys the parasite.

5. Wash salad items and other food to be eaten raw.

6. Always wear protective clothing and boots when dealing with farm animals and remove them before washing your hands and entering the family home.

7. Avoid swimming pools until 2 weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea.

Patients with poor immunity

Patients with poor immunity may be advised by their doctor not to drink unboiled tap water because if it is infected, the symptoms may be prolonged or life threatening. This advice is more relevant in the spring and early summer when mains tap water may be contaminated by this parasite. People who have an impaired immune response, whether congenital or acquired due to illness or drug treatment should never drink unboiled tap water. If you are unsure whether your condition merits this advice, you should check with your doctor.

Bringing the water to the boil is adequate to destroy the parasite. Prolonged boiling is not necessary. To avoid scald injuries it is advisable to boil a full kettle last thing at night, allow to cool overnight and then store in the fridge until required. Bottled water varies in its risk of being contaminated with the parasite, though so far there have been no reports of Cryptosporidium in bottled water causing illness in the UK.