

# Cryptosporidiosis

## Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
An Office of the  
Department of Health and Human Services

### What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is caused by a parasite called *Cryptosporidium*. The parasite has a hard outer shell, so it can survive outside the body for a long time and is very hard to kill.

The parasite lives in the intestines of people and animals. It passes out of the body in the feces. The parasite is found in soil, food, water, and on surfaces that have been contaminated with feces. People get the disease when they swallow the parasite.

### What are the signs and symptoms?

The most common symptom is watery diarrhea. Other symptoms include stomach pain, fever, nausea, vomiting, dehydration, or weight loss. Some people may have no symptoms. The symptoms can last 1 to 2 weeks. The symptoms may seem to get better and then get bad again before they finally go away.

### How will I know if I have it?

The only way to know for sure that you have the disease is to have a stool sample tested at the laboratory. It may take a few days to do the test.

### How is it treated?

Most people get better without any treatment. There is medicine that your doctor may give you. Everyone with diarrhea should drink a lot of fluids to prevent dehydration. Babies and children can get very sick from dehydration.

### How can I prevent it?

The best way to prevent illness is to practice good hygiene and to avoid water that might have the parasite in it.

- Wash hands with soap and water
  - After using the toilet or changing diapers
  - Before and after preparing or eating food
  - After handling animals, animal living spaces and animal waste
  - After gardening

- Do not swim if you have diarrhea. Children in diapers should not be in the water if they have diarrhea.
- Do not depend on chlorine or iodine to make water safe from *Cryptosporidium*.
- Do not swallow water when swimming or boating.
- Do not drink untreated water from lakes, streams, ponds, or springs.
- Avoid unpasteurized juices and raw milk products.
- Wash all raw fruits and vegetables with clean water and/or peel before eating.
- When traveling, do not use ice or drink tap water and avoid eating uncooked foods in countries where the water may not be safe and sanitation is poor.

### What about work and daycare?

People with cryptosporidiosis should not prepare or serve food to others until their diarrhea has stopped. Children should not go to daycare until the diarrhea has stopped. Healthcare workers should not provide patient care until they are free of diarrhea.

### Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website [www.maine.gov/idepi](http://www.maine.gov/idepi). The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another great source of health information.