

Cryptosporidium

Public health information sheet

Cryptosporidium is a parasite that can cause diarrhoea, stomach cramps and vomiting. Young people and older people can get very sick from cryptosporidium and it can be life threatening. People become infected when they swallow the parasites, usually from drinking contaminated water. You can be infected with the illness in New Zealand. It is more common in rural areas, places with lakes, and when water sources are near farmyard animals

How does it spread?

You get cryptosporidium by swallowing the cryptosporidium parasite (bacteria). This most often occurs when people drink unsafe (contaminated) water.

People or animals who have cryptosporidium can pass on the parasites in their poo (faeces). These can then contaminate soil, food or water, or surfaces such as toys, bathroom taps or doors, and nappy change tables.

The parasites can live in the environment for long periods, especially in lakes, rivers, streams and roof water. There is no way of telling by taste, sight or smell if soil, food, water or a surface has cryptosporidium parasites in it or on it.

Symptoms

Symptoms can include:

- diarrhoea (runny poo)
- stomach pains
- feeling or being sick.

Symptoms normally appear a week after someone has been infected. The illness typically lasts two weeks or more. For some people, such as the very young or very old, cryptosporidium may last a long time and be life threatening.

If you have symptoms

- Contact your doctor, or call Healthline for free on 0800 611 116.
- Your doctor may request a faeces sample for testing.
- Testing is the only way to confirm if you have the illness.

There is no treatment for cryptosporidium but some medicines are available that can help ease your recovery and giving symptomatic relief. While recovering you should drink plenty of water. If you have a child that is ill and not able to drink you should go back to your doctor.

Restrictions

If you have cryptosporidium you are at risk of passing on the virus to others. You should stay home from work, school or daycare until you have been free of diarrhoea symptoms for at least 48 hours (2 days).

It's important to practice good hand washing habits. Wash hands with soapy water for 20 seconds, then dry well with a clean cloth or paper towel every time:

- after going to the toilet
- before preparing food, eating or drinking
- after changing babies nappies

You should also avoid using public swimming pools until at least two weeks after your symptoms have gone away. If you or a child are unwell then do not share bathwater, as this can easily pass on the infection.

Prevention

You can reduce your risk by following simple precautions. In addition to practising good hand washing habits, be careful when drinking untreated water especially when out tramping and camping.

Make sure drinking water is safe

- Avoid drinking water that has not been treated – including water from lakes, rivers or streams, or from an area where you don't know the quality of source water.
- If you have to drink untreated water that is taken from a roof, river or lake (eg, in a rural area), it should be boiled for at least one minute or treated.

Precautions when tramping and camping

- Use toilets if they are available.
- If there are no toilets, bury your toilet waste and paper. Make sure you bury it at least 50 metres away from water sources, such as rivers, lakes or springs.
- Do not wash your hands directly in a water source. Collect water in a clean container, wash your hands with soap and water and then drain used water into the ground away from the water source.

For more information

For more information visit:

- [info.health.nz/cryptosporidium](https://www.health.govt.nz/healthline/cryptosporidium)

If you are concerned about cryptosporidium call Healthline for free on 0800 611 116 or contact your doctor or practice nurse.