

Environmental Services

Cryptosporidium

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is an infection caused by a single-celled parasite called *Cryptosporidium parvum*.

Infection occurs when the cysts are eaten and attach to the lining of the gut. Infection can be caused by as little as 1-100 cysts.

How long can it take to develop symptoms?

The incubation period is between 1-12 days, average 7 days.

What are the symptoms?

Illness starts with a lot of watery diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever and weight loss.

Symptoms usually clear up in 1-3 weeks except in those with certain diseases such as AIDS where the immune system is already weakened where they may continue for many weeks or months.

Who can get cryptosporidiosis?

Infection is most common in children between 1-5 years but is uncommon below 6 months of age or in adults over 45 years.

How is cryptosporidiosis transmitted?

There are a number of ways this can happen:

- **Animal to man.** Contact with infected livestock e.g. calves and lambs. Cases have occurred following [educational visits to farms](#) where orphan lambs are bottle fed by visitors. Companion animals may occasionally be implicated.
- **Man to Man.** Person to person spread to household contacts of index cases and care attendants.

- **Food.** Cases can occur in association with raw milk, offal and undercooked sausages.
- **Occupational.** Farm workers and veterinary students are at risk because of their job.
- **Water.** Cysts are resistant to chlorination, and require physical means of removal. There have been outbreaks related to inadequate drinking water treatment.
- **Swimming Pools.** Cases have occasionally occurred from pools.

How is cryptosporidiosis diagnosed?

A diagnosis of cryptosporidiosis is made by microscopic examination of faeces.

How is cryptosporidiosis treated?

Encourage affected people to drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated.

Symptoms resolve in otherwise healthy children and adults, although this may take 2-3 weeks.

Can cryptosporidiosis be prevented?

This can be done by following a number of simple measures:

- Avoiding contact with infected animals.
- Handwashing after handling farm animals.
- Adequate water supply filtration.
- Ensuring that those with diarrhoea do not visit swimming pools.

- People suffering from AIDS or who are HIV positive with a CD4 count less than 200 should bring their tap water to the boil and cool before drinking. These people should also avoid bottled water.
- People who suffer from severe combined immunodeficiency disorder should bring their tap water to the boil and cool before drinking. These people should also avoid bottled water

How long are patients infectious?

Cysts may be excreted for weeks after infection, but for practical purposes patients are considered to be unlikely to transmit from 48 hours after symptoms cease.

How long do I have to stay off work/school?

After you have been symptom free for 48 hours.

Why has the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) contacted me?

- They want to find out how and where you might have caught *Cryptosporidium* and to advise you about how to avoid passing it on to other people.

The (EHO) Environmental Health Officer may ask for details of

- The person who is ill
- Other people living in the house
- What symptoms you had
- Whether you have been abroad recently

They may also ask for faecal specimens from you and members of your household.

Further advice or copies of this information sheet may be obtained from:

Environmental Services
Rochford District Council
South Street
Rochford
Essex
SS4 1BW

For more information on food safety please visit our website <http://www.rochford.gov.uk> and follow the links from Business to Food Safety or telephone 01702 318045.



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