

## WATERBORNE PATHOGENS - CRYPTOSPORIDIUM

*Cryptosporidium* (crip-toe-spor-id-ee-um) is a protozoan, a single-celled parasite, that lives in the intestines of animals and people. The dormant form of *Cryptosporidium*, called an oocyst (O-o-sist), is excreted in the feces (stool) of infected humans and animals.

The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis (crip-toe-spor-id-ee-O-sis) is watery diarrhea. This usually develops 4 to 6 days after infection. The effects of prolonged diarrhea and dehydration can be dangerous, especially for the very young, the elderly, and the frail. This disease can be life-threatening for the immunocompromised.

If *Cryptosporidium* is the suspected cause of an intestinal illness, the doctor should request a specific diagnostic test. There is currently no drug that can cure cryptosporidiosis. Normally healthy people will recover on their own.

This pathogen is spread when you put anything in your mouth that has been in contact with feces from an infected animal or person. This includes food or water which have been contaminated. **Frequent handwashing is the single most important thing people can do to avoid spreading cryptosporidiosis.**

Boiling water is the best method of killing *Cryptosporidium* oocysts. Point-of-use filters with an “absolute” pore size of one micron or smaller will remove all the oocysts.

Oocysts are present in most surface bodies of water (e.g. lakes and rivers) across the United States, many of which supply public drinking water. It is not known exactly how many oocysts are sufficient to cause cryptosporidiosis, but the low numbers of oocysts sometimes present in drinking water are not considered cause for alarm in the general public. You can minimize the chances of getting infected with *Cryptosporidium* by always practicing good hygiene, especially after possible exposure to sources of infection.

For more information:

- Call the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791
- Call the CDC AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS
- For a listing of drinking water treatment units that meet NSF standards, call 1-800-NSF-8010