



# Tarrant County Public Health

*A healthier community through leadership in health strategy*

## Facts About Cryptosporidium (Crypto)

### **What is Cryptosporidium?**

*Cryptosporidium* is a microscopic parasite that causes the diarrheal disease cryptosporidiosis. Both the parasite and the disease are commonly known as “Crypto.” There are many species of *Cryptosporidium* that infect animals, some of which also infect humans. The parasite is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time and makes it very tolerant to disinfection.

### **How is Crypto spread?**

Crypto lives in the gut of infected humans or animals. An infected person or animal sheds Crypto parasites in their poop. An infected person can shed 10,000,000 to 100,000,000 Crypto germs in a single bowel movement. Shedding of Crypto in poop begins when symptoms like diarrhea begin and can last for weeks after symptoms stop. Swallowing as few as 10 Crypto germs can cause infection.

### **Who is at risk for Crypto infection?**

People with weakened immune systems may develop serious, chronic, and sometimes fatal illness. Examples of people with weakened immune systems include people with HIV/AIDS, those with inherited diseases that affect the immune system; and cancer and transplant patients who are taking certain immunosuppressive drugs. The risk of developing severe disease may differ depending on each person's degree of immune suppression.

### **What are the symptoms of Crypto infection?**

The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis is watery diarrhea (which can last one – two weeks). Other symptoms include stomach cramps or pain, dehydration, nausea, vomiting, fever and weight loss. Some people with Crypto will have no symptoms at all. It can also cause dehydration in young children, pregnant women and other vulnerable populations. People who experience these symptoms should contact their medical provider.

### **How long can the symptoms last?**

Symptoms usually last about one to two weeks (with a range of a few days to four or more weeks) in persons with healthy immune systems. Occasionally, people may experience a recurrence of symptoms after a brief period of recovery before the illness ends. Symptoms can come and go for up to 30 days.

### **How is Crypto infection treated?**

Most people with healthy immune systems will recover without treatment. Diarrhea can be managed by drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. People in poor health or who have weakened immune systems are at higher risk for more severe and prolonged illness. Young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to dehydration resulting from diarrhea and should drink plenty of fluids while ill. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea may be especially life threatening to babies.

NOTE: *Cryptosporidium* is not killed by alcohol gels and hand sanitizers. Soap and clean running water are specifically recommended for preventing cryptosporidiosis.

**more**

## **What is Public Health doing about Crypto:**

Tarrant County Public Health regularly inspects public swimming pools. TCPH also recommends the following measures to help protect yourself, your family and others in recreational swimming areas:

- Do not swim when you are ill with diarrhea, and for two weeks after your diarrhea has stopped. Cryptosporidium is chlorine resistant.
- When you swim or wade in pool, lake or river, avoid getting water in your mouth.
- Practice good hygiene (i.e., shower before swimming).
- When swimming with children, take them on bathroom breaks or check diapers often. Waiting to hear “I need to go,” may be too late.
- Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area --not at the poolside.
- Crypto germs can be spread to surfaces and objects in and around the pool and cause illness.
- Wash children thoroughly (especially in the diaper region) with soap and water before swimming.

In household, day-care facilities and other settings, use proper hygiene.

- Wash hands regularly, especially after using the bathroom and before preparing food. Hand washing is the most effective means of preventing Cryptosporidium transmission.
- Observe children as they wash their hands and assist when needed.
- Wash children’s hands when they arrive at day care, after they use the toilet, after having their diaper changed and before eating snacks or meals.
- Wash hands after changing diapers.
- Take extra care to wash hands and clean surfaces if caring for someone with diarrhea --especially diaper- or toddler-age children.

**For more information, call 817-321-4700 or visit**  
**<http://health.tarrantcounty.com>**



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