

Cryptosporidiosis

This leaflet is to tell you about Cryptosporidiosis. In otherwise fit people, this illness usually doesn't cause any long term problems though it is an unpleasant condition while it lasts. People with impaired immune systems can sometimes fail to rid themselves of Cryptosporidiosis, leading to a permanent, though fluctuating, illness.

Now read on.....

What is Cryptosporidiosis and how common is it?

Cryptosporidiosis is the term for an infection with a microscopic single-celled animal called *Cryptosporidium parvum*. The infection occurs all year round but there is often a rise in cases a couple of weeks after an episode of heavy rainfall following a long dry spell.

How is Cryptosporidiosis caught?

The principal sources of the organism are the intestines of humans and animals. The affected animal, and less commonly human, may be entirely well. Because the number of organisms necessary to set up infection is very small, cryptosporidiosis is easily caught.

Transmission may be direct (e.g. touching a contaminated animal and then putting the hands in the mouth) or indirect (e.g. the animal contaminates a water source and a person subsequently drinks from that source).

The incubation period (the interval between getting the infection and becoming ill with it) is usually between 3 and 10 days. The organisms are present in the stool for several weeks after an ill person becomes well again, so infection can be transmitted to others throughout this period.

What are the symptoms of Cryptosporidiosis?

In otherwise healthy persons, there is diarrhoea and abdominal pain which are sometimes severe and last 2-3 weeks before full recovery. In otherwise healthy people, symptoms typically come and go over several weeks before the person recovers. As happens in animals, a person can get cryptosporidiosis and yet stay well.

In people with impaired immune systems, cryptosporidiosis is much more protracted and the symptoms may be far more severe.

Are there any long term complications of Cryptosporidiosis?

Normally, there are no long-term implications. However, there can be problems for those people who have impaired immunity.

How do you know if you have Cryptosporidiosis?

Many different kinds of illnesses can cause diarrhoea or abdominal cramps. Cryptosporidiosis can therefore only be diagnosed by examining a stool sample in a laboratory.

How is Cryptosporidiosis treated?

There is no proven treatment for the condition. A drug called Spiramycin is sometimes used in patients with impaired immunity, but it does not appear particularly effective.

What can I do to prevent Cryptosporidiosis? What can I do if I have it?

There is no vaccine to prevent Cryptosporidiosis, nor do you become immune to it longterm. The most important means of avoiding infection is by strict hygiene, particularly after handling animals or dealing with babies and young children with diarrhoea. Remember that animals can appear entirely well yet be able of transmitting cryptosporidium to humans.

Occasionally, contaminated water is the source of infection and the only sure way to make contaminated water fit to drink is to bring it to the boil. Just bringing water to the boil kills cryptosporidium instantly – there is no need to hold it at the boil.

Cryptosporidium is resistant to disinfectants such as ammonia and chlorine.

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