

## Cryptosporidiosis (Crypto)

Cryptosporidiosis (crypto) is an infection caused by a parasite. Crypto can be found in animals, humans, soil and water. It grows in the gut and bile ducts.

About 15% to 20% of people with AIDS have crypto. Some cases are mild. A healthy person can heal from crypto in about a week.

A person with a weak immune system may not get rid of it for a long time. This will happen when CD4 cell counts fall below 300. When people with HIV have crypto that lasts four or more weeks, it can be a sign of AIDS.

### Symptoms

- Loose stool
- Sick to your stomach
- Throwing up
- Stomach cramps

Loose stool can make it hard for the body to get vitamins and minerals from food. If the problem goes on for a long time, it can cause weight loss and wasting.

### Causes

Crypto is spread when you come into contact with the parasite. It can spread when you eat food or drink water with the parasite. Direct contact with a person or animal with crypto can also spread the disease.

There is a big risk of crypto with oral-anal sex. You cannot tell if the parasite is on the area around the anus, thighs or buttocks. You could be infected even if the area looks clean. Always practice safer sex and use a dental dam for oral-anal sex. Plastic wrap can be used if you do not have a dental dam.

### Prevention

- Handwashing. Wash hands often with soap and warm water. Wash your hands before you handle food, after you use the bathroom, garden, handle dirty laundry or animals, or change diapers.
- Animals. Puppies and kittens under 6 months old and stray animals are more likely to carry crypto. Try not to pet these animals.
- Practice safer sex. Crypto can be spread through mouth-to-anus contact, such as in "rimming." Use plastic wrap or a dental dam.
- Try not to swallow water when you swim or use a hot tub since the water may contain crypto. Chlorine does not kill the parasite.
- Avoid raw oysters.
- Wash raw fruit and vegetables before you eat them. Cook food all the way through. The parasite will be killed when cooked.

Some cities have crypto in their public water. Check with the local water works. A person with a low CD4 count who lives in a city with crypto should be careful.

You may need to boil water for one minute before you drink or cook with it. You can also drink filtered water. Filtered water should be filtered through a 1-micron filter or be labeled "Meets National Science Foundation (NSF) standard number 53 for cyst removal." If you do not have access to a filter, distilled water is the safest choice.

### How to Know if You Have Crypto

Many diseases share symptoms with crypto. A doctor needs to rule those out before they can be certain. A doctor will most likely check your stool (poop) for parasites and their eggs. This is called an *O and P test*.

## **Treatment**

HIV meds will get rid of or help with the symptoms so the immune system is able to fight off the infection. If you are not taking HIV meds, it is important to discuss starting treatment with your doctor. There are a few meds that can decrease the length of time with the infection. Loose stool can be treated with over-the-counter products. Loose or frequent stool that lasts for a long time can be treated with a product called Sandostatin. You should always drink a lot of fluid when you have loose stool.

### **For more information**

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

