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Cryptosporidiosis

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by microscopic parasites. Once an animal or person is infected, the parasite lives in the intestine and passes in the stool.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis is diarrhea. Other symptoms include dehydration, weight loss, stomach cramps or pain, fever, nausea and vomiting. Some people with cryptosporidiosis will not have symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear after infection occurs?

Symptoms generally begin 2 - 10 days (average 7 days) after becoming infected with the parasite. In persons with healthy immune systems, symptoms usually last about one to two weeks. The symptoms may go during cycles in which you may seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse again before the illness ends.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

Cryptosporidium lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. Millions of parasites can be released in a bowel movement from these sources. Cryptosporidium is also found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with infected human or animal feces. The parasite can be spread by:

- Accidentally putting something into your mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with feces of a person or animal infected with cryptosporidium.
- Swallowing contaminated recreational water (water from swimming pools, hot tubs, Jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams that have been contaminated with sewage or feces from humans or animals).
- Eating uncooked, contaminated food.
- Accidentally swallowing cryptosporidium picked up from surfaces (such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) contaminated with infected feces.

How is cryptosporidiosis treated?

Medication is available for people with healthy immune systems; however, most people who have a healthy immune system will recover without treatment.

Individuals exhibiting diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Anti-diarrheal medicine may provide some relief, however you should talk to your health care provider before taking it.

How can you prevent cryptosporidiosis?

- Practice good hygiene and avoid water that might be contaminated.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet and before handling or eating food (especially persons with diarrhea).
- Wash hands after changing diapers.
- Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea (essential for children in diapers).
- Do not swallow recreational water.
- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams.
- Do not use untreated ice or drinking water when traveling in foreign countries.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating in uncontaminated water.
- Avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling in countries with minimal water treatment and sanitation systems

How can I get more information?

For more information on cryptosporidiosis or any other health issues, call the Sedgwick County Health Department at 660-7392.