

# ***Cryptosporidium***

*Cryptosporidium* is a parasite that causes diarrhea. It is found in infected people's or animal's stools and cannot be seen by the naked eye. *Cryptosporidium* is also found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with infected human or animal feces.

*Cryptosporidium* has become one of the most common causes of recreational water illness in the United States and is found in almost every part of the world. In 2021, North Carolina reported 262 cases of cryptosporidiosis. Incidence of cryptosporidiosis has steadily increased in North Carolina over the last three years and is currently above pre-COVID pandemic levels.

*Cryptosporidium* can be found in places like swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams. The cyst stage of this parasite, which is resistant to chlorine disinfection used in pools, can survive for long periods of time in the environment.

*Cryptosporidium* can get into the body when someone swallows contaminated recreational water; puts something contaminated with the parasite in his or her mouth; accidentally swallows something that has come in contact with the stool of a person or animal infected with *Cryptosporidium*; or swallows *Cryptosporidium* picked up from surfaces (such as lounge chairs, picnic tables, bathroom fixtures, changing tables) contaminated with stool from an infected person. It is not spread by contact with blood.

The most common symptom of cryptosporidiosis is watery diarrhea. Other symptoms include stomach cramps or pain, dehydration, nausea, vomiting, fever, and weight loss. Some people with cryptosporidiosis will have no symptoms at all.

Symptoms generally begin between two and 10 days, or seven days on average, after becoming infected. In persons with healthy immune systems, symptoms usually last about one week to two weeks. The symptoms may go in cycles in which a person seems to get better for a few days and then feels worse again before the illness ends.

Although *Cryptosporidium* can infect anyone, some groups are more likely to develop more serious illness. Young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to the dehydration resulting from diarrhea. People with severely weakened immune systems are at risk for more serious disease. Their symptoms may be more severe and could lead to serious or life-threatening illness.

## **You can protect yourself and your family from *Cryptosporidium* infections!**

- Don't swim when you have diarrhea.
- Don't swallow the pool water.
- Practice hygiene. Take a shower before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Take your child on bathroom breaks.
- Change diapers often and in a bathroom, not at the poolside.
- Wash your child thoroughly (especially the rear end) with soap and water before swimming.

For more information, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's webpage on [Cryptosporidiosis](#). If you have health questions about *Cryptosporidium*, contact the [NC Communicable Disease Branch](#) Epidemiologist on Call at (919) 733-3419.

Adapted from the CDC's webpage on [Cryptosporidium](#).