

Fact sheet

Cryptosporidiosis in the home

Cryptosporidiosis is a type of gastroenteritis (gastro) caused by the parasite *Cryptosporidium*. It is usually transmitted from person to person or animal to person. However, it also occurs when the parasites are taken in by mouth through consuming contaminated food or water (e.g. public swimming pools). This fact sheet provides information and advice on preventing the spread of cryptosporidiosis in the home.

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is an infection of the bowel caused by the parasite *Cryptosporidium*. The main symptom is watery diarrhoea, which occurs in conjunction with stomach cramps. Other symptoms can include fever, vomiting, nausea and loss of appetite.

Symptoms can develop anywhere between 1 and 12 days after becoming infected with *Cryptosporidium*. Symptoms will usually last 1-2 weeks. The illness can be spread by the infected person from the time symptoms appear until 14 days after all symptoms have ceased. During this period, *Cryptosporidium* is still excreted in the faeces.

How does it spread?

Cryptosporidium is spread via the faecal-oral route. This means you can only become infected after ingesting the parasite. *Cryptosporidium* can be found in soil, food, and water, or on surfaces that have been contaminated with the faeces of infected humans or animals (including pets). For example, *Cryptosporidium* can be spread by:

- > touching your mouth with contaminated hands: hands can become contaminated through a variety of activities, such as changing nappies, caring for an infected person, or touching surfaces that have been contaminated by faeces from an infected person (e.g. toys, bathroom and toilet fixtures, and nappy changing tables)
- > swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*, including that from swimming pools,

spas, fountains, lakes, rivers etc

- > swallowing water or other beverages contaminated with faeces from infected humans or animals
- > eating uncooked food contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*, such as fruits and vegetables
- > exposure to human faeces through sexual contact

What can I do to prevent the spread of cryptosporidiosis in my home?

Swimming pools and spas

If someone in your household has been diagnosed with cryptosporidiosis, they should not use your swimming pool or spa until 2 weeks after the symptoms have stopped. If an infected person has used your pool or spa during the infectious period, you should disinfect the pool or spa to prevent the spread of infection to others. If you are not confident that you can successfully disinfect the pool on your own, contact a pool maintenance company (fees apply).

When using chlorine to disinfect a pool or spa against *Cryptosporidium*, the following process is recommended:

- > Add sufficient chlorine to the water to achieve 10mg/L free chlorine residual.
- > Ensure 10mg/L free chlorine is maintained continuously for at least 25.5 hours (you will need to add more chlorine periodically).
- > Operate the pump and filter at all times during disinfection.



- > Backwash the filter thoroughly after completing the disinfection process.

Caution: After disinfection, do not use the swimming pool or spa until the free chlorine level falls to the normal concentration. This may require leaving the pool unused for another day or two.

It may be quicker, easier and more cost effective to drain and thoroughly clean your spa rather than undertake the disinfection process. Contact SA Water with regards to water restrictions before draining your spa.

Baths

As with swimming pools and spas, *Cryptosporidium* can be spread through sharing bath water. If a child in your household has cryptosporidiosis, they should not share a bath with another child. After the infected child has been bathed, the bath should be emptied and cleaned with household bleach before refilling. If you wish to use the same bath water for multiple children, the infected child should be bathed last to prevent the spread of infection. Alternatively, a shower may be used rather than a bath as the risk of infection spreading through a shower is minimal.

Hands

While hands should usually be washed often, if someone in your house has cryptosporidiosis extra care should be taken. You should wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds, ensuring you rub your hands vigorously and pay attention to the backs of your hands, wrists, between fingers and under fingernails.

This should be done especially:

- > before preparing or eating food
- > after using the toilet
- > after changing a nappy or assisting a child to use the toilet
- > before and after tending to someone who has cryptosporidiosis
- > after handling an animal or animal waste
- > after gardening

Nappies

If a young child, still in nappies, is diagnosed with cryptosporidiosis extra care must be taken to ensure that you dispose of the nappy correctly, that you wash your hands thoroughly after the nappy has been changed and that the change table is cleaned after each use.

Animals

Cryptosporidium can sometimes be spread through animals, including cats, dogs and farm animals. Animals that do not display symptoms are still capable of spreading cryptosporidiosis to family members. For this reason it is important to wash your hands thoroughly after coming into contact with animals, their faeces, or their living areas.

Further information

- > For more information on cryptosporidiosis, see the fact sheet at: <http://www.dh.sa.gov.au/pehs/ygw/cryptosporidiosis-pehs-sahealth-2009.pdf>
- > For information on water restrictions contact SA Water on 1800 130 952

For more information

Health Protection Programs

SA Health

Telephone: 08 8226 7100

Fax: 08 8226 7102

Email: HealthProtectionPrograms@health.sa.gov.au

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

