

Cryptosporidiosis

Background Information

Cryptosporidiosis is an infectious diarrhoeal disease caused by a waterborne protozoan parasite. It is a disease of humans and animals, including cattle and sheep.

Organism

Cryptosporidium parvum

Incidence and Transmission

Cryptosporidiosis cases have been declining in the UK for many years, but there are still around 4000 recorded cases each year in England and Wales.

Cryptosporidium most commonly affects young children and the immunocompromised, but can affect anyone.

Cryptosporidium is found in the gut of man and animals (particularly cattle and sheep). It is also found in water contaminated with faeces.

It can be transmitted via contact with infected animals, by drinking or swimming in contaminated water and by eating contaminated food, eg salad vegetables. It can be spread from person to person where there is poor hygiene.

Occupations and processes where *Cryptosporidium* may present a risk

Occupational exposure to *Cryptosporidium* may occur in those who:

- are in contact with infected animals, particularly calves and lambs, or humans;
- are in contact with materials from infected animals, particularly faeces; or
- are in contact with water contaminated with animal faeces.

Occupations where there may be a risk of occupationally acquired cryptosporidiosis include:

- farm workers;
- abattoir workers, meat processing plant workers and butchers;
- veterinary surgeons;
- workers in outdoor leisure industries in contact with water, eg watersports instructors;
- sewage and waste water workers;
- construction/demolition/building renovation workers – where there is stagnant water; and

- healthcare and care workers;

Clinical Information

The incubation period is 2–10 days (average 7 days). The main symptom is watery diarrhoea, but symptoms can also include fever, stomach cramps and vomiting. Anyone with severe symptoms should seek medical attention. There is no treatment apart from rehydration therapy and most people recover within one month.

Control

The following control measures reduce the risk of infection:

- Good occupational hygiene practices should be followed, especially washing with warm water and soap.
- Cuts and abrasions should be covered with waterproof plasters.
- Suitable protective clothing should be worn.
- A suitable disinfectant should be used – the parasite is resistant to most common disinfectants.

Further Information

[Public Health England – Cryptosporidium](#)