



Cryptosporidiosis Fact Sheet for people with HIV



What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a disease caused by a protozoan parasite called *Cryptosporidium*. Not all individuals exposed to *Cryptosporidium* develop this disease. People with cryptosporidiosis generally have watery diarrhea, and may have nausea, vomiting, decreased appetite, and stomach cramps. People with competent immune systems who develop cryptosporidiosis generally get better on their own. In people with compromised immune systems cryptosporidiosis can be chronic and life threatening.

Cryptosporidiosis Surveillance

Surveillance for cryptosporidiosis began in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1996. From 1996 to 2000 San Francisco had much higher rates of cryptosporidiosis than the surrounding counties. Since 2000 cryptosporidiosis rates in San Francisco have been decreasing, likely because of the introduction of highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART) for people with HIV. HAART has helped many people to improve their immune status; this makes it easier to avoid cryptosporidiosis infection.

How can people with HIV prevent cryptosporidiosis?

Maintaining a strong immune system through the use of highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART) is the best way to prevent infection with cryptosporidiosis. In general the severity and length of disease is directly related to the level of immune suppression. The stronger one's immune system the less chance there is of becoming infected with *Cryptosporidium* and of developing a chronic illness. According to at least one study, drinking bottled water or filtered water lowers the risk of infection. Minimizing exposure to fecal matter by avoiding the behaviors listed below will also minimize the risk of infection.

How is *Cryptosporidium* transmitted?

Cryptosporidiosis is spread by ingesting *Cryptosporidium* oocysts. These oocysts replicate in the intestine of humans and other animals and are shed through bowel movements. Food, household surfaces, and water can all become contaminated with fecal matter containing oocysts.

Possible ways of getting cryptosporidiosis include:

- Anal-oral sexual contact (rimming);
- Contact with contaminated recreational water such as a swimming pools, hot tubs, water slides, lakes, or streams;
- Contact with domestic animals and livestock, especially if they are young and/or have diarrhea;
- Drinking contaminated water;
- Exposure to others' feces (for example, when caring for someone with diarrhea);
- Household contact with children attending day care centers;
- Other sexual contact that could involve exposure to feces;
- Travel to foreign countries, particularly to areas where water treatment infrastructure is less developed.

For more information:

- San Francisco City Clinic
Information about rimming and anal/oral sex may be found on the [STD Risk Chart](#)
- CDC Fact Sheets
[Guidance for people with severely weakened immune systems](#)
[Cryptosporidiosis resources for immunocompromised persons](#)