What is cryptosporidiosis?
Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal illness caused by a parasite which is found in the feces (stool) of infected animals or humans.

What are symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?
Symptoms include watery diarrhea, abdominal cramps, lack of appetite, nausea, vomiting and low-grade fever. Based on the severity of the symptoms, weight loss and dehydration may occur. Symptoms often come and go but usually last for 1 to 2 weeks. It is also possible to be infected and not have any symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?
Symptoms usually appear 1-12 days after exposure. The average time is 5-8 days.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?
Cryptosporidiosis is often spread by the following routes of transmission:

- Contact with an animal or person ill with Cryptosporidium (i.e., household, child care, farm, petting zoo contacts, etc.)
- Drinking contaminated or inadequately treated water:
  - drinking any lake or stream water presents a risk of swallowing Cryptosporidium organisms
  - swallowing public recreational water, which may have become cross contaminated by an infected person or animal, may also pose a risk
- Eating food contaminated by animals or food handlers
- Certain types of sexual contact (e.g., oral-anal contact)

Children who attend day care centers, including diaper-aged children, animal handlers, travelers, men who have sex with men, and close personal contacts of infected individuals (families, health care workers and child care workers) are particularly prone to infection. Outbreaks have been associated with child cares, consumption of well water and raw dairy products (i.e., unpasteurized cow milk), and recreational use of water including waterslides, swimming pools and lakes.

How long is a person infectious (contagious)?
Persons ill are most contagious while they have symptoms but can continue to be contagious for weeks after symptoms have stopped. Treatment with medication often shortens the length of time a person is infectious. Cryptosporidium cysts can continue to be infectious for 2-6 months or longer outside the body when in a moist environment.

How is cryptosporidiosis diagnosed and what is the treatment?
Cryptosporidiosis is not easily diagnosed unless a stool test is used to look for the germ. Most people will recover from this illness without medication. The FDA has approved Nitazoxanide as a treatment option for children greater than 1 year old and adults. Immunosuppressed or HIV positive individuals should not take Nitazoxanide. It is important to drink plenty of fluids while ill to prevent dehydration. People who have a weakened immune system may have more severe symptoms and a longer length of illness.

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How can I prevent a cryptosporidiosis infection?

1. Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and warm water before handling food and dishes. Wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing diapers. Wash hands thoroughly and frequently when gardening, or handling pets or farm animals, particularly young animals like calves. Always wash your hands after handling any waste.

2. Drink only treated water. When camping or backpacking, bring bottled water with you or boil untreated water (i.e., river) for 3 - 5 minutes at a rolling boil before using it (even for washing). Heat produced during the boiling process kills the germ.

3. Take hygiene precautions when traveling in developing countries. Foods and drinks, in particular raw fruits and vegetables, tap water or ice made from tap water, unpasteurized milk or dairy products and items from street vendors may be contaminated.

4. Wash fruits and vegetables with safe water, especially if you plan to eat them raw. You can also peel fruit that you will not cook.

5. Avoid unpasteurized milk or dairy products and unpasteurized juices.

6. If you have diarrhea do not cook for others.

7. Wash your hands carefully if in contact with animals sick with diarrhea.

8. Do not swallow any water from lakes, rivers, pools or jacuzzies. Water swallowed accidentally while swimming may contain the germ. Do not swim in public pools or hot tubs if you have diarrhea or within 2 weeks of resolution of your diarrhea even if you were treated with a medication. Chemical disinfectants are not effective against cryptosporidiosis.

Cryptosporidiosis is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department. In Snohomish County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 425.339.3503, Monday-Friday, 8AM - 5PM.