

“Crypto” (krip-TOE)

Facts for People Living with Compromised Immune Systems

Examples of persons with a compromised immune system include those with living with AIDS; cancer and transplant patients who are taking certain immunosuppressive drugs; and those with inherited diseases that affect the immune system.



What is Crypto?

Crypto is a germ that causes diarrhea. Crypto, short for *Cryptosporidium*, is found in infected people’s stool and cannot be seen by the naked eye. This germ is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive for long periods of time and makes it resistant to chlorine disinfection found in pools.

If I have a compromised immune system, why should I be concerned about Crypto?

The risk of developing severe disease may differ depending on each person’s degree of immune suppression. For most people living with a compromised immune system, Crypto can be serious, long-lasting, and sometimes fatal.

If your CD4+ cell count is below 200/μl, Crypto is more likely to cause diarrhea and other symptoms for a long period of time. If your CD4+ count is above 200/μl, your illness may not last more than 1 to 3 weeks, or slightly longer.

Even after the diarrhea stops you could still carry the infection, which means that the Crypto germs are living in your intestine, but are not causing illness. As a carrier of Crypto, you could infect other people. Later, if your CD4+ count drops below 200/μl, your symptoms may reappear.

How can I protect myself from Crypto?

You can reduce your risk of getting Crypto. These steps will also help protect you against other diseases. Consult with your health care provider to determine whether your medical condition makes it advisable to follow all of these recommendations.

- Drink “safe” water.*
- Wash your hands often.
- Practice safer sex.
- Avoid touching farm animals.
- Avoid touching the stool of pets.
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming in the ocean, lakes, rivers, or pools, and when using hot tubs.
- Wash and/or thoroughly cook your food.

*For a detailed explanation of “safe” water and these other recommendations go to: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/cryptosporidiosis/factsht_crypto_prevent_ci.htm