

FACT SHEET

Cryptosporidium

Common clinical features

Watery or mucoid diarrhoea, accompanied by cramping abdominal pain. Symptoms commonly last for several days, up to 4 weeks. Asymptomatic infection is common. Prolonged and severe infection occurs in individuals with severe immunodeficiency.

Incubation period

Average 7 - 10 days, range 1 – 28 days.

Where is it found?

Gastrointestinal tract of man and animals, particularly farm and other domesticated animals. Drinking and recreational water contaminated with faeces or sewage.

How is it acquired by affected individuals?

Contact with infected animals or animal faeces. Outbreaks have been associated with drinking water supplies and rarely contaminated food. Seasonal outbreaks are associated with farm visits (open farms). Infection has been reported following contamination of swimming and paddling pools. Person to person spread does occur particularly in households and nurseries. The cysts are not killed by the levels of chlorine used to disinfect drinking water supplies.

How does the laboratory confirm the diagnosis?

The cysts are detected by microscopy or using an immunoassay test on the faeces. Results are usually available within 2 days of receipt in the laboratory.

How is it treated?

Rehydration and symptomatic treatment. There is no specific treatment although several anti-cryptosporidial agents are under investigation for treatment of immunodeficient patients.