

Cryptosporidiosis

CAUSE: Cryptosporidiosis (KRIP toe spo RID ee O sis or Crypto) is caused by a protozoan parasite, *Cryptosporidium parvum*, that can infect animals and humans.

EFFECT: Crypto invades the lining of the intestines, then proceeds through multiple reproduction cycles. The host may shed up to 10^{10} (10 billion) oocysts per day for 3 to 12 days in calves and 18 days, on average, in humans. Infected calves often have markedly watery diarrhea beginning at about a week of age. Signs of infection in humans include cramping and upset stomach as well as diarrhea and a slight fever.

How is *Cryptosporidium* spread? The parasite spreads primarily by the fecal-oral route through either contaminated feed or water. Environmental contamination by oocysts can be significant and leads to reinfection or infection of new animals in a pen that hasn't been power-washed first.

How can *Cryptosporidium* be prevented? It is very difficult to prevent infection with Crypto once it is established on a farm. Separate neonates from their dams immediately and prevent fecal cross-contamination of pens, feed and water buckets. Thoroughly clean and power-wash pens between animals to reduce the load of oocysts in the environment. Be sure not to spread contamination during bucket washing. The oocysts are resistant to chlorox at standard dilutions. Complete drying, UV irradiation, and repeated freeze-thaw cycles will kill the oocysts.

Does *Cryptosporidium* affect people? Yes, Crypto can affect humans, especially those with no previous exposure. It is more severe in young or immunocompromised people. There is a lag period of 2 to 10 days between infection and development of symptoms, which may last for about 2 weeks.

What if there is an outbreak? If found in humans, consult a healthcare provider. Farms where *Cryptosporidium* is endemic (commonly found) are unlikely to get rid of it.

For more information on *Cryptosporidium*, see:

[Cryptosporidiosis in Dairy Calves](#)

[CDC: Cryptosporidiosis \(also known as “Crypto”\)](#)

[USDA: Water Quality—Cryptosporidium](#)

[The Merck Veterinary Manual: Cryptosporidiosis](#)