What is cryptosporidiosis?
Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by a microscopic parasite. It can live in the intestine of humans and animals and is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal. Both the disease and the parasite are also commonly referred to as “crypto.” The parasite is found in every region of the United States and throughout the world.

How is cryptosporidiosis transmitted?
Cryptosporidium is transmitted by direct ingestion of contaminated feces or water. Consumption of contaminated water is the most common means of transmission. Ingesting uncooked contaminated foods may also lead to infection.

What are the symptoms in people?
Symptoms include watery and profuse diarrhea, stomach cramps, upset stomach, and a slight fever. Some people have no symptoms.

What are the symptoms in animals?
Cryptosporidiosis is common in calves. Infected calves can shed a large number of infectious organisms (oocysts). Calves generally will have diarrhea. Other animals such as pigs, foals, and cats can also be infected.

How soon do the symptoms appear?
Symptoms generally begin 2-10 days after infection. In persons with healthy immune systems, symptoms usually last about two weeks; the symptoms may go in cycles in which you may seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse, before the illness ends.

How is cryptosporidiosis diagnosed?
Infection is diagnosed on a submitted stool sample.

How is cryptosporidiosis treated?
Cryptosporidiosis usually resolves on its own. Supportive care is necessary in cases of severe diarrhea.

How can cryptosporidiosis be prevented?
The best way to prevent infection is by practicing good hygiene—wash your hands often. Avoid contaminated water—do not swallow pool or untreated water, boil or filter water if uncertain, and be cautious when traveling to other countries. Avoid contaminated food by washing and peeling vegetables and fruits before eating, and using clean water to wash foods.

Additional Information:
- Minnesota Department of Health

This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated 2005.