

This Parasite Can Keep Re-Infecting for Up to Six Months – For You or Your Pet

It is so infectious it takes just a few oocysts to make you downright miserable. And under certain circumstances, it can survive and keep on infecting for up to six months. Find out how it's transmitted and what you can do to greatly reduce your risk of a severe infection.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cryptosporidiosis is a parasitic disease that causes gastroenteritis and diarrhea
- Young and immunosuppressed animals are at highest risk for infection, and often acquire the parasite by ingesting contaminated food or water
- In pets with competent immune systems, cryptosporidiosis often causes no symptoms. In symptomatic pets, signs of infection include lethargy, abdominal cramping, and diarrhea
- Treatment in otherwise healthy animals is not required, however, immunocompromised pets may need intravenous fluids to prevent dehydration
- The best defense against cryptosporidiosis is to keep your pet's immune system healthy and balanced

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published April 24, 2016.

Cryptosporidiosis is a disease caused by the protozoan parasite *Cryptosporidium*. The most common species that affects pets is *Cryptosporidium parvum*.

Cryptosporidiosis causes gastroenteritis and diarrhea in a variety of animals, including humans. It's especially prevalent in lambs and calves. Birds, rabbits, and fish can also be infected. Fortunately, the disease is much less common in dogs and cats.

Cryptosporidiosis can be a primary disease as well as a secondary disorder in pets with compromised immune systems. Crowding and unsanitary conditions increase the risk of exposure, and young animals are more susceptible to infection. The disease is typically mild in **pets with competent immune systems**.

How Cryptosporidiosis Is Transmitted

Infected animals shed the parasite in their feces. In damp environments, the organism can survive for up to six months.

It can be transmitted when an animal ingests contaminated food or water, or licks or comes in contact with a contaminated object or surface. Rarely, transmission can occur by inhaling the organism.

Symptoms of Infection

The cryptosporidium parasite is very infective. In fact, it only takes a few oocysts to cause disease in humans.

In pets with healthy immune systems, cryptosporidiosis is self-limiting, and oftentimes an infected dog or cat will show no symptoms. Others may have mild diarrhea and typically recover quickly.

In symptomatic pets, signs of infection occur within a few days of exposure, and can include:

- Lethargy
- Abdominal cramping
- Watery diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss

Symptoms usually resolve without treatment, though occasionally the diarrhea persists, and the animal can become dehydrated. The severity of the disease depends on the immunocompetence of the dog or cat.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Cryptosporidiosis

Diagnosis of cryptosporidiosis is usually made by fecal examination (a fecal sample is sent to a laboratory for special staining and examination techniques), or with a fecal PCR test.

Most otherwise healthy dogs and cats require no treatment for cryptosporidiosis. In pets with competent immune systems, the infection will simply run its course.

Immunocompromised animals may need intravenous (IV) fluids to for hydration.

Natural antiprotozoal support, including a special tincture of cat's claw called Samento, can also be very beneficial in patients that are showing symptoms.

Preventing Infection

To prevent your dog or cat from contracting cryptosporidiosis, don't allow them to sample animal feces or drink from any body of water that could be contaminated. Keep sick animals separate from healthy ones, and clean and disinfect areas where animals have been ill or had diarrhea.

Since cryptosporidiosis is primarily a disease of young animals with immature immune systems, as well as immunocompromised pets, the best way to prevent your dog or cat from becoming ill after exposure is to make sure her immune system is healthy.

Boosting Your Pet's Immune System

A healthy immune system is a balanced immune system, and there are a number of things you can do as a pet owner to maintain your dog or cat's immune health.

- Exercise has direct benefits for your pet's immune system. When your dog or cat works her muscles, it helps cleanse the body of toxins and keeps the lymphatic system working well.
- Massage increases lymphocyte numbers and enhances their function. Massaging your pet also relaxes her, which is very good for her emotional health and therefore, her immune health.
- Keeping your pet at an ideal body weight is also very important. A species-appropriate fresh food diet will help manage inflammatory responses, which in turn will help improve your dog or cat's immune function.

Providing a source of probiotics and fermented foods to pets also bolsters GI resiliency and overall immune health. The more antioxidants you can offer your pet through whole food nutrition, the better. This is impossible to do if you're feeding an entirely processed diet in the form of dry or canned pet food.

Animals have a very high antioxidant requirement, and you really have only two options for meeting those requirements. You can either provide a synthetic vitamin and mineral supplement (which is how the majority of processed pet food manufacturers do it), or you can provide whole food nutrition.

To be vibrantly healthy, animals need lots of unprocessed, living, and fresh whole foods to meet their antioxidant requirement, which includes vitamin A, all the B vitamins, vitamin C, vitamin E, zinc, selenium, and vitamin D. Fresh meats and organs, herbs, and organic, non-genetically modified vegetables are excellent natural sources of the vitamins and antioxidants your pet needs for a balanced, healthy immune system.

- Reducing the amount of chemicals that are in, on, and around your pet is also important for maintaining a functional immune response in your dog or cat. Toxins in your pet's immediate environment play a huge role in creating immune system dysfunction.
- Offering fluoride- and chlorine-free water is also important, as is toxin-free air for your pet to breathe. Minimizing vaccines and topical pesticides found in flea and tick preventives is also important.

The biggest insult to young pets' developing immune systems is repeated unnecessary vaccines. Holistic veterinarians have long recognized the importance of a balanced immune system, and they have lots of tools to help re-balance an underactive or overactive immune system.

Try to partner with a veterinarian who prioritizes the health of your dog or cat's immune system. The goal is to make your pet's immune system healthy enough to thrive above the level of opportunistic pathogens, including cryptosporidiosis.
