

Disease outbreak at a summer camp highlights ways to stay healthy



For many children, summer means spending weeks or months at camp. Though summer camp can be a great place for kids or young adults to learn new skills, make friends, and participate in outdoor activities, camp can also provide the perfect environment for spreading germs.

A 2009 outbreak at a camp in North Carolina involved 46 people sick with a disease called cryptosporidiosis. This disease is caused by *Cryptosporidium* (or “Crypto” for short), a parasite that causes diarrhea that usually lasts 1-2 weeks.

The parasite can be spread by swallowing recreational water (for example, water from lakes, rivers, or pools), drinking water, or eating food that has been contaminated with feces (poop) that contains Crypto. Crypto can also be spread by infected people or animals.

What kids can do to avoid Crypto at camp:

Handwashing is very important because Crypto germs can be spread when hands are not washed with soap and clean, running water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not work against Crypto.

Make sure to wash hands:

- After touching an animal or an animal’s manure (poop) or environment (for example, an animal’s stall). Hands should also be washed after taking off clothing or shoes that might have animal manure on them.

- Before, during, and after handling food.
- Before eating.
- After coming in contact with feces or vomit, or handling clothes/linens soiled with feces or vomit, even if you use gloves.

People sick with diarrhea should not go swimming or prepare food. A person with diarrhea can easily contaminate the water or food with Crypto germs and cause others to be sick.

What camps can do to keep Crypto from spreading:

- Provide handwashing facilities with soap and clean, running water so campers and staff can wash hands after touching something that might have Crypto germs on it. Also, remember alcohol hand sanitizers are not effective against Crypto.
- Screen campers and staff for diarrhea and other gastrointestinal symptoms as they arrive at camp and monitor them while they are there. Separate campers and staff who become ill with diarrhea or have other gastrointestinal symptoms to reduce the risk of spreading Crypto.
- Keep pools, lakes, and other recreational water venues up to the standards set by local or state laws. People ill with diarrhea should not swim in these or other areas.
- Maintain drinking water wells at the camp to standards set by local or state law. The water that supplies the well can become contaminated with germs by runoff from farms or faulty septic tanks. At least once a year, check wells for mechanical problems and test them for possible contaminants.

For more information, please visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/> or call CDC Info at 1-800-CDC-INFO.