

What is cyclosporiasis?

Cyclosporiasis is a diarrheal illness caused by a single-celled parasite called *Cyclospora cayetanensis*. The first known human cases of illness caused by *Cyclospora* were reported in 1979. Cases have been reported more frequently since the early 1980's due to the availability of better laboratory techniques to detect the parasite in stool samples.

What are the symptoms of cyclosporiasis?

Cyclospora infects the small intestine and typically causes illness characterized by watery diarrhea. Other symptoms can include loss of appetite, weight loss, bloating, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, muscle aches, low-grade fever, and fatigue. Symptoms may last from several days to several weeks, and weight loss can be significant (exceeding 20 pounds in some cases). Some infected persons may not have any symptoms.

Who gets cyclosporiasis?

Persons of all ages are at risk of infection. Cyclosporiasis occurs more often among persons living or traveling in developing countries; however, infections occur worldwide including the United States. Cyclosporiasis has been associated with diarrhea in travelers to Asia, the Caribbean, Mexico and Peru.

How is cyclosporiasis spread?

Humans become infected with *Cyclospora* by ingesting food or water that was contaminated with infected stool. The parasite is not transmitted directly from person to person. *Cyclospora* must undergo developmental changes over several days or weeks after being passed in a bowel movement to become infectious. Outbreaks of cyclosporiasis have been associated with consumption of contaminated water and various types of imported produce.

How soon after infection do symptoms occur?

The incubation period for cyclosporiasis ranges from one to two weeks.

How long can an infected person spread the parasite?

People may shed *Cyclospora* from days to more than one month while experiencing diarrhea. It is not known how long the parasite may be shed after symptoms have stopped.

Should people sick with cyclosporiasis stay home from work, school, or day care?

If a person is employed as a food handler, works in a day care center, or has direct contact with ill persons or the elderly, they must not work while they have diarrhea until 24 hours after diarrhea has stopped. Children with diarrhea should not attend a day care center until 24 hours after diarrhea has stopped.

What is the treatment for cyclosporiasis?

Specific antibiotics called Bactrim or Septra (trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole) prescribed by a physician is the recommended treatment for cyclosporiasis. Persons should also rest and drink plenty of fluids.

What can be done to prevent a *Cyclospora* infection?

The best way to prevent infection is to avoid water and food that may be contaminated with stool. Persons experiencing diarrhea should wash their hands often to prevent the spread of infection. Avoid drinking unboiled and untreated water when hiking and traveling in developing countries. Bringing water to a full, rolling boil is sufficient to kill *Cyclospora*. Thoroughly wash all fresh fruits and vegetables prior to consumption.

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