

Crypto Alert for Health Professionals: Increasing Reports of Crypto Cases and Outbreaks

Crypto cases are on the rise!

Cryptosporidiosis, more commonly known as “Crypto,” was first associated with an outbreak of recreational water illness (RWI) in 1988. This RWI has been a public health issue in the past and will likely pose an even bigger challenge in the future. The number of Crypto cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has risen substantially in recent years. In 2005, 2006, and 2007 the number of non-outbreak–related Crypto cases rose 41%, 24%, and 66%, respectively (see Figure 1). In 2006 and 2007 considerable increases in the number of outbreaks associated with treated venues, such as pools and recreational water parks, were also reported to the CDC (see Figure 2).

Why is this happening?

A combination of factors may be contributing to these increases. Healthcare providers may be testing more for Crypto in patients with diarrhea since Alinia (nitazoxanide) was approved in 2005 to treat Crypto in patients 12 months and older. Heightened awareness about the disease may also have caused swimmers, healthcare providers, and health departments to think about where a person recently swam rather than the last place he or she ate.

Another possibility could be that increases in the number of cases detected by state Crypto surveillance systems have increased the likelihood that the cases will be investigated and more outbreaks will be identified. Finally, Crypto may be spreading through various parts of the country. It is unknown how much of the observed increases in reports of Crypto cases and outbreaks is attributable to each of these factors.

How can you help?

Collaborate and communicate with community partners (e.g., pool operators and child care centers) to ensure that they are aware of RWIs, such as Crypto, and knowledgeable about prevention strategies related to waterborne illnesses. This works best if health departments build a communication network with community partners and other regional (state and local) health departments prior to an outbreak to enable a rapid response when Crypto case reports begin to rise or an outbreak is detected.

Remember that during an outbreak, prevention messages may be most effective if delivered early, even if the outbreak source has not been confirmed yet, so that partners can implement appropriate prevention strategies. Together, health professionals and community partners share the responsibility of informing and educating the public. All parties involved should work together to bring the public on board with the basics of healthy swimming behaviors (i.e., don't swim when ill with diarrhea; stop water activities at child care centers during outbreaks; practice good hygiene; etc.). RWI Prevention Week 2008 (May 19–25, 2008) is a great place to start this effort. You can find additional information at www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming.

Figure 1: Cryptosporidiosis Non-Outbreak Cases: United States, 1994–2007*

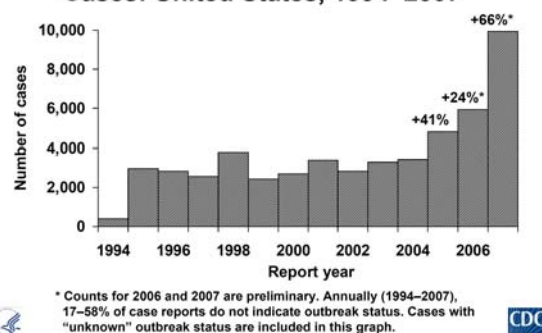


Figure 2: Cryptosporidiosis Outbreaks by Recreational Water Type: United States, 1988–2007*

