

Cronobacter Infection

Frequently Asked Questions

What is *Cronobacter* infection?

Cronobacter (croh-noh-back-ter) infection is a rare bacterial infection caused by the pathogen *Cronobacter*. These bacteria are found naturally in the environment and can contaminate dry foods. Infections are not common but can be serious and even deadly.

Who gets *Cronobacter* infection?

Although it is possible for anyone to become infected with *Cronobacter*, some people are at greater risk including:

- Infants – Infants younger than 2 months old are at the greatest risk. Additionally, premature babies and infants with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable.
- People with weak immune systems
- People 65 and older

How is *Cronobacter* spread?

Primarily, *Cronobacter* spreads from the environment to dry foods such as powdered infant formula, powdered milk, herbal teas, and starches. It can also contaminate feeding items like breast pump equipment. *Cronobacter* infections in infants less than 12 months of age are often linked to powdered infant formula; powdered formula is not sterile and may have germs in it – it can get contaminated in homes or in processing facilities that make it.

What are the symptoms of *Cronobacter* infection?

In infants less than 12 months of age, *Cronobacter* usually begins with a fever and poor feeding, excessive crying, or very low energy. Symptoms can sometimes include seizures. *Cronobacter* infection can lead to serious illness, and infants with symptoms should be taken to a medical provider as soon as possible. Serious symptoms can include bloodstream infections, meningitis, and urinary tract infections.

How is *Cronobacter* infection diagnosed?

Cronobacter infection is diagnosed by laboratory testing of blood or cerebrospinal fluid.

What is the treatment for *Cronobacter* infection?

There are antibiotics that are effective against *Cronobacter*. Infants found to have bloodstream infections (sepsis) or meningitis are hospitalized.

Can people with *Cronobacter* infection pass the illness to others?

Cronobacter infection is not spread from person to person. There is no need to avoid contact with infected individuals.

How can *Cronobacter* infection be prevented?

To prevent babies from getting *Cronobacter* infection:

- Breastfeed if you can:
 - Very few cases of *Cronobacter* infections have been reported among infants fed only breast milk.
- Clean, sanitize, and store infant feeding items safely
 - Germs can grow quickly if you add breast milk or formula to a partially used bottle or only rinse a used bottle (rather than cleaning it).
 - Carefully clean, sanitize, and store items such as bottles, breast pump parts, nipples, caps, rings, valves, and other objects that enter the baby's mouth such as pacifiers and teething rings.
 - Take apart bottles and breast pump equipment after use so you can clean them thoroughly.
- Keep hands and surfaces clean
 - Before preparing or feeding bottles or food to your baby, it is important to start with clean hands and surfaces.
 - Wash your hands with soap and water and if not available use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
 - You should wash your hands before touching your baby's mouth, before touching pacifiers or other things that go into your baby's mouth, and after using the toilet or changing diapers.
 - Clean surfaces like countertops and sinks with soap and water.
 - Do not place feeding items or breast pump parts directly in the sink because germs in sinks/drains could contaminate these items.
- Prepare and store formula safely
 - If you feed your baby with formula, consider using liquid, ready-to-feed (RTF) formula when possible, especially if your baby is at higher risk. Powdered infant formula is not sterile and might have germs in it. Liquid infant formula is made to be sterile (without germs).
 - If you feed your baby with powdered infant formula, it is even more important to keep surfaces, feeding items, and hands clean to prevent germs that can make your baby sick from getting into the formula container. Don't set the formula scoop on the counter, in the sink, or on any other surface. Keep lids and scoops clean and completely dry, and close containers of formula as soon as possible after using them.

Where can I get more information?

- Your healthcare provider
- Your local health department
- New Jersey Department of Health Website: www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/cronobacter
- CDC Website: www.cdc.gov/cronobacter

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a healthcare professional. Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization.