

Cyclosporiasis

Frequently Asked Questions

What is cyclosporiasis?

Cyclosporiasis (sigh-klo-spore-eye-eh-sis) is an intestinal illness caused by a one-cell parasite, *Cyclospora cayetanensis*. The parasite lives in the intestine and produces eggs (cysts) that are passed from the body in the stool. The first known human cases of illness caused by cyclospora were reported in 1979. In the last several years, outbreaks of cyclosporiasis have been reported in the United States and Canada. New Jersey reports an average of eight cases of cyclosporiasis each year.

How is cyclosporiasis spread?

Cyclospora is spread when people swallow water or food that was contaminated with infected stool. For example, outbreaks of cyclosporiasis have been linked to various types of fresh fruits and vegetables imported from countries with poor water treatment systems.

Cyclospora needs time (days or weeks) after being passed in stool to be able to infect others. Therefore, it is not likely that *Cyclospora* is passed directly from person to person. Infected people do not need to stay home from work or school. It is not known whether animals can be infected and pass infection to people.

Who gets cyclosporiasis?

Anyone can get cyclosporiasis. In the past *Cyclospora* infection was usually found in people who lived in, or traveled to, developing countries. However, people can be infected worldwide, including in the United States.

What are the symptoms of cyclosporiasis?

The symptoms may include:

- Watery diarrhea (often frequent and explosive)
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Bloating
- Increased gas
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Muscle aches
- Low-grade fever
- Fatigue

Not all people infected with *Cyclospora* have symptoms. Symptoms usually appear within one week after swallowing the parasite.

How is cyclosporiasis diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects cyclosporiasis, samples of the patient's stool will be examined. Because testing for *Cyclospora* infection can be difficult, a person may be asked to give several stool samples over several days. Special laboratory tests are needed to find this parasite in stool. Your health care provider might have your stool checked for other organisms that can cause similar symptoms.

What is the treatment for cyclosporiasis?

Cyclosporiasis can be treated with antibiotics. There is no over-the-counter medication that will cure this infection. As with any foodborne illness, people who are experiencing diarrhea should rest and drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

How can cyclosporiasis be prevented?

- Avoid water or food that may be contaminated with stool.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- When traveling in countries where the water supply may be unsafe, avoid drinking unboiled tap water and avoid uncooked foods (such as salads and fruits) washed with unboiled tap water.
- Anyone with diarrhea should not prepare food for others.

Where can I get more information?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/parasites/cyclosporiasis/index.html

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.