

Cyclospora

Food Act 2006

Cyclospora is a protozoan parasite that infects the small intestine (bowel) and causes the gastrointestinal illness, cyclosporiasis. It is common in parts of the world that have poor sanitation and hygiene. It is most common in tropical and subtropical areas.

Although many species of *Cyclospora* can be found in animals, *Cyclospora cayetanensis* is the only species known to infect humans.

Individuals infected with the parasite shed a non-infectious form of the parasite (oocysts) in their faeces (poo). This requires an extended period of environmental exposure to develop into the infectious form, usually one to two weeks.

In developed countries cyclosporiasis is typically associated with consumption of imported produce, or with international travellers who have visited parts of the world where the parasite persists.

How does *Cyclospora* cause foodborne illness?

Cyclosporiasis generally occurs following ingestion of water or food that is contaminated with *Cyclospora*. Direct person-to-person transmission is unlikely as the oocysts shed from individuals are not infectious and require a period of time outside the host to become infective. This differentiates *Cyclospora* from other parasites such as *Cryptosporidium*.

Food can become contaminated when water contaminated by sewerage has been used to wash produce or water horticulture crops. Foods that are most frequently implicated in cases of cyclosporiasis are herbs, berries, leafy greens and produce intended to be consumed raw.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can be affected by *Cyclospora* but certain people are at greater risk of contracting the illness, including:

- young children
- the elderly
- those who travel to parts of the world where the parasite is found
- immunocompromised individuals may develop more severe clinical symptoms.

What are the symptoms of *Cyclospora* foodborne illness?

Most infected people will experience the following symptoms within one week (may range from two days to more than two weeks) after ingesting the infective form of the parasite:

- abdominal (stomach) cramps
- watery diarrhoea
- loss of appetite and weight loss
- nausea (vomiting is less common)
- bloating
- fatigue
- body aches
- low grade fever

Untreated individuals may experience relapsing symptoms that typically last for 10-12 weeks and reinfection may occur.

Prevention

The most effective way of preventing foodborne illness associated with *Cyclospora* is to prevent contamination of food. This can be achieved by:

- cooking food thoroughly and serving it immediately or keeping it hot (60°C or hotter) until serving
- washing fruit and vegetables with clean running water before eating, cutting or cooking
- always washing your hands thoroughly with soap and running water and drying them before preparing food and between preparing raw and ready-to-eat foods
- keeping your kitchen clean and ensuring all food contact surfaces are cleaned and sanitised before preparing food and between preparation of raw foods and ready-to-eat foods
- excluding any food handlers with diarrhea from work until they have no symptoms for 48 hours.

What to do if you suspect a case of foodborne illness

If you suspect you have foodborne illness, seek medical advice.

A faeces (poo) sample may be required to confirm the presence of *Cyclospora*.

Diarrhoea can cause dehydration, so it is important to drink plenty of fluids.

If you have a concern about a food product or a food business, Queensland Health provides an online form to make a food complaint. This is available at <https://phconnect-foodcomplaints.health.qld.gov.au>

Further information

For health advice, please contact your doctor or nearest health facility, or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

For food safety advice and further information relating to *Cyclospora* in food, contact your local Public Health Unit at www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/contact-us/contact/public-health-units.

The Food Pantry has advice related to food safety for food businesses and consumers at www.qld.gov.au/foodpantry.