

Frequently Asked Questions About Cyclosporiasis

What is Cyclosporiasis?

Cyclosporiasis is a gastrointestinal illness caused by a microscopic (tiny, not seen without a microscope) parasite *Cyclospora cayetanensis*. It is a foodborne illness typically contracted by consuming contaminated fresh fruit, vegetables or water.

Who is at risk of getting Cyclosporiasis?

Anyone can get cyclosporiasis, but people with weakened immune systems (such as those taking immunosuppressive medications or living with HIV), the elderly, or children may experience more severe illness or complications from severe dehydration and may need longer treatment. It is commonly associated with foreign travel to tropical or subtropical areas of the world. Outbreaks have also been associated with various types of imported and domestic fresh produce.

If you eat food contaminated with Cyclosporiasis, how quickly will you get sick?

The time between becoming infected with Cyclosporiasis and becoming sick is usually about one week, though it can range from 2-14 days or more.

What are the symptoms of Cyclosporiasis?

The most common symptoms include severe, watery diarrhea (loose stool/poop), (can be frequent), along with loss of appetite, weight loss, abdominal cramping, bloating, nausea and vomiting, fatigue, and low-grade fever.

How long do symptoms last?

Symptoms usually start about a week after ingestion and can last from days to several weeks.

What is the treatment for Cyclosporiasis?

Oral antibiotics, specifically trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (e.g., Bactrim), along with rest and fluids to prevent dehydration.

If you don't seek treatment, will you recover on your own (without antibiotics)?

Yes, most people with healthy immune systems will eventually recover from Cyclosporiasis on their own without antibiotics, but the risk of being hospitalized for dehydration is extremely high. Without treatment, symptoms can last anywhere from a few days to a month or longer and may follow a remitting-relapsing course.

What should you do if you think you have Cyclosporiasis?

If you suspect you have been exposed or are experiencing symptoms, visit your healthcare provider, who can test for Cyclosporiasis and prescribe treatment.

If you are diagnosed with Cyclosporiasis, can you give it to other people?

Direct person-to-person spread is very unlikely because the parasite requires days to weeks in the environment to become infectious. It spreads via the oral route (ingesting food or water contaminated with the parasite).

What things can I do to lower my risk of getting Cyclosporiasis?

- Wash hands carefully with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after food preparation, and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- Discard all outer layers of fruit and vegetables. For example, throw away the outer two to three layers of leafy vegetables like lettuce.
- Rinse all fruits and vegetables thoroughly under clean running water.
- Scrub fruit and vegetables with a vegetable brush.
- Clean kitchen counter tops, cutting boards, utensils, etc. with hot, soapy water.
- Cook all the food you eat to an inner temperature of at least 158 degrees.

Does alcohol hand sanitizer kill Cyclospora parasites?

No, alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not kill or effectively remove the Cyclospora parasite from surfaces. Cyclospora parasites are resistant to alcohol-based sanitizers.

Does vinegar, lemon juice, or other acidic cleaners kill Cyclospora parasites?

No. The parasite's thick-walled oocysts (spores) are highly resistant to vinegar, lemon juice and other acidic cleaners.

Should I wash fruit and vegetables with soap, bleach, or ammonia?

No. Consumers **should not** use soap, bleach, ammonia or any other chemical cleaning products on food. Chemical cleaning products do not kill Cyclospora parasites and may leave a toxic residue on the food.

Which fruits and vegetables are Cyclosporiasis most frequently linked to?

- Leafy greens: Bagged salad mixes, romaine and iceberg lettuce, mesclun, and spinach.
- Fresh herbs: Cilantro, basil, and parsley.
- Berries: Raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries.
- Vulnerable vegetables: Snow peas, sugar snap peas, and green onions (scallions).

If the packaging says the fruit or vegetables are already washed, does that mean it is free from Cyclospora parasites?

No. Commercial washing processes are not sufficient to remove the parasite—wash them again.

If I wash all the fruit and vegetables I consume, but don't cook them, am I still at risk of getting Cyclosporiasis?

Yes, because washing alone cannot guarantee removal of Cyclospora parasites.

Does cooking fruits or vegetables kill Cyclospora parasites?

Yes. Cyclosporiasis cannot survive inner cooking temperatures higher than 158 degrees Fahrenheit, so cooking fruits and vegetables thoroughly is the most effective way of killing Cyclospora parasites. For water: boil water at a rolling boil for at least 1 minute (or 2 minutes at elevations above 2,000 meters or 6,562 feet).

Is there a vaccine for Cyclosporiasis?

No.

Where can I find additional information?

- The Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/cyclosporiasis/hcp/clinical-care/index.html>
- The Virginia Department of Health: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/cyclosporiasis/>
- The Mayo Clinic: <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/infectious-diseases-a-z-what-you-need-to-know-about-cyclospora-infection/>
- The Cleveland Clinic: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17957-cyclosporiasis>
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration: <https://www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/investigation-5-state-outbreak-cyclospora-illnesses-iceberg-lettuce-july-2026>

Who can I contact at DBHDS who can help answer my questions, or help me find additional resources?

You may contact a Registered Nurse Care Consultant within the Office of Integrated Health at DBHDS for technical assistance and additional resources by emailing: communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov.

References:

- [U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(2026, July\). Cyclospora.](#)
- [Cleveland Clinic \(2026, April\). Cyclosporiasis.](#)
- [Balzer, Deb \(2018\). Infectious diseases A-Z: What you need to know about cyclospora infection.](#)
- [Virginia Department of Health \(2026\). Cyclosporiasis.](#)