

What are the Health Risks for Consuming Contaminated Water?

Cryptosporidium

Cryptosporidiosis became a reportable illness in Washington in 2001. Originally considered a parasite of animals, reptiles and birds, it first was detected as a source of illness for humans in 1976. Health officials now believe Cryptosporidium has been causing human illnesses for a long time, but it was overlooked due to difficulties in testing and diagnosis.

Cryptosporidium occurs in the feces of infected animals or humans. It is environmentally resistant and may survive outside the body for long periods of time. To become infected, a person must consume contaminated food or water, including from streams or rivers. Bottled water may be a reasonable alternative to tap water, but the origin, quality and treatment of water before it is bottled varies considerably among companies and even among brands of water produced by the same company.

Generally, water that is labeled as follows is free of Cryptosporidium: “Reverse osmosis treated,” “Distilled,” “Filtered through an absolute one micron or smaller filter.” Carbonated water in cans or bottles is usually filtered or heated enough to remove Cryptosporidium. Fountain drinks made from tap water should be avoided during boil water notices. [Cryptosporidiosis became a reportable illness in Washington in 2001.](#)