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SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY EXPERIENCING INCREASES IN THE PARASITIC DISEASE “CRYPTO”

STOCKTON, CA (August 17, 2017) – Local health officials are advising the community of an increase in the number of reported cases of Cryptosporidiosis (also known as “Crypto”) and recommending steps to take to prevent the spread of this contagious infection. Crypto is a diarrheal disease caused by a microscopic parasite. The most common way of getting infected is by swallowing contaminated recreational water. This parasite can also be transmitted easily from person to person such as in households, child-care centers and schools.

“Since early July, we have 17 people confirmed along with an additional 41 symptomatic contacts,” reports Dr. Karen Furst, Assistant Public Health Officer for San Joaquin County. In the past five years, San Joaquin County averaged only 1 case per year. Many regions throughout the United States are also experiencing increases in Crypto outbreaks. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports there were twice as many Crypto outbreaks linked to swimming pools and water playgrounds in 2016 as in 2014. “These outbreaks highlight the ongoing challenges that treated recreational water venues have with Crypto due to how difficult it is to kill and the small number of germs that can make people sick,” says Linda Turkatte, Director of San Joaquin County Environmental Health Department.

While most cases reported in San Joaquin County were infected by swallowing contaminated recreational water from different sources (pools, splash pads, lakes and the Delta), some are also becoming sick from exposure to others who are infected or from items that are contaminated from those who are infected. This can happen by changing a diaper or when a person sick with Crypto fails to wash their hands thoroughly after using the restroom then touches an object or prepares food. People can be infectious and continue to spread the parasite even weeks after symptoms have stopped.

Symptoms include watery diarrhea and stomach cramps, which generally begin 2 to 10 days (average 7 days) after becoming infected with the parasite and usually last about 1 to 4 weeks in persons with healthy immune systems. Symptoms can come and go for up to 30 days. People who are in poor health, have a weakened immune system, are pregnant, or a young child are at higher risk for more severe and prolonged illness or dehydration.

The San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS) and Environmental Health Department have been working together with the California Department of Public Health to investigate the reports of Crypto, address the problems found and recommend strategies to prevent further spread of the disease. PHS sent a Health Advisory to local healthcare providers to increase awareness of the situation and provide medical recommendations. An important step in prevention efforts includes educating the public on what they can do to protect themselves and others.

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Prevention is key to stopping this disease. The CDC recommends you take the following steps to protect yourself and others from Crypto at recreational water venues:

- *Don't swim or let your kids swim or play in recreational water facilities such as water parks if sick with diarrhea. Wait until two weeks after diarrhea has stopped to go swimming.*
- *Don't swallow the water in which you swim or play.*
- *Rinse off in the shower before getting in the water to help remove any germs on your body that could contaminate the water.*
- *Take kids on bathroom breaks often, and check diapers in a diaper-changing area that is not right next to the pool.*

"In addition to proper pool etiquette you can reduce your risk of illness due to Cryptosporidium by washing your hands with soap and water vigorously for at least 20 seconds, by washing fruits and vegetables, by not sharing food and cleaning surfaces frequently if someone in your house has diarrhea," advises Dr. Furst. Individuals should wash their hands thoroughly and often but especially:

- *before preparing or eating food;*
- *after using the bathroom or changing diapers;*
- *before and after helping someone who has used the toilet or has diarrhea; and,*
- *after handling an animal or animal waste.*

Also, see your health care provider if you suspect you have a parasite illness for treatment options. To learn more about Cryptosporidium visit these Crypto websites:

- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/>*
- *California Department of Public Health, <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Cryptosporidiosis.aspx>*

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