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Cryptosporidium strikes again



Few cases of illness tend to be linked to water supplies

The discovery of the cryptosporidium parasite in water supplies in Glasgow comes a matter of months after an outbreak struck the north east of Scotland.

The latest alert has affected about 140,000 people in Glasgow after the infection, which can cause severe diarrhoea, was detected in the Mugdock Reservoir in Milngavie.

Those in the affected areas have been urged to boil water before drinking it.

However, Scottish Water said it was safe to use for washing clothes and dishes and for bathing - although not for bathing babies.

No-one has yet reported any illness associated with the Glasgow incident.

The most recent outbreak in the UK struck the Grampian region in January.

More than 140 people in the north east fell ill after the infection was thought to have been spread through the public water supply.

The first confirmed cases of cryptosporidium in tap water in the UK emerged in 1989, when there were separate outbreaks in Oxfordshire and North Humberside.

Heavy rain

Cryptosporidium parvum causes about 5,000 cases of illness every year in the UK.

However, only a few are linked with water supplies.

The parasite is usually spread by farm animals.



Cryptosporidium is commonly spread by animals

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It thrives in the dung of farm animals and pets and may be washed into rivers and streams by rain.

This is thought to be the cause of the latest incident, which follows heavy rain and flooding in the Glasgow area.

Cryptosporidiosis, the illness caused by the parasite, tends to peak during the lambing season.

Incubation period

It has also been associated with school visits to farms, while the organism can also be spread from person to person through poor hygiene.

The incubation period for the illness is usually about one week.

The symptoms, which usually only last for a few days, can include diarrhoea, stomach cramps, upset stomach and a slight fever.

However, illness tends to strike older people and children.

The parasite is protected by an outer shell which allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time and makes it very resistant to chlorine disinfection.

However, it can easily be filtered out of water supplies due to its size.

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