# Cryptosporidium outbreak at Cowbridge Farm leaves child critically ill and sparks urgent health warnings



A seemingly innocent outing to a petting farm has turned into a distressing ordeal for a four-year-old boy from Bridgend, Wales, who became severely ill after visiting Cowbridge Farm Shop. The child, Michael Carpenter, visited the farm on April 11, accompanied by his grandmother, while his family prepared for a planned holiday. This familiar annual trip took a dark turn when Michael exhibited alarming symptoms just days into their holiday in Malaga.

His mother, Kate Wiejak, recounted to BBC News that Michael had been visiting the farm routinely and was especially fond of petting lambs. His family took precautions, ensuring he washed his hands and used sanitizer after animal contact. However, two days into their vacation, Michael began developing a fever and diarrhoea, which his father initially attributed to food or sun exposure. Despite their hopes that a dose of Calpol would suffice, Michael's condition worsened, leading his parents to incur a hefty bill of €5,000 (£4,229) for medical treatment at a private hospital.

Michael’s illness was later attributed to infection by **cryptosporidium**, a parasite that can cause gastroenteritis. This parasite is particularly dangerous for vulnerable individuals, such as young children or those with weakened immune systems, and can be transmitted through contact with infected faeces from animals or contaminated surfaces. Following their visit to the farm’s calf and lamb feeding sessions, Michael became one of 74 confirmed cases linked to this incident.

Health experts have pointed out that the parasite can spread when hand hygiene is neglected, with as few as ten infectious organisms sufficient to cause illness. Symptoms typically include abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhoea, which can persist for weeks, especially in people with compromised immune systems. Michael’s parents, though relieved by his eventual recovery, described the experience as an “absolute nightmare,” highlighting the stress and uncertainty for families affected by such outbreaks.

Following the incident, Cowbridge Farm Shop has halted all animal feeding and petting activities. They are cooperating fully with a Public Health Wales investigation, which aims to determine the broader public health implications of the outbreak. As confirmed cases emerged, health officials reported a rising number of hospitalisations, raising concern about the potential for further spread.

Su Mably, a consultant in health protection at Public Health Wales, emphasised the importance of stringent hygiene practices when visiting farms. She stated, “While the infection is usually mild and self-limiting, it can be more serious in young children or people with weakened immune systems.” Health officials are now urging anyone who visited the farm during this time and is experiencing symptoms to contact their GP or local health services.

This incident follows a cautionary backdrop from the UK Health Security Agency, which had issued warnings the previous year regarding the risks of cryptosporidium infections from farm visits, reminding the public of the crucial need for diligent handwashing after contact with animals. Similar outbreaks linked to animal contact have previously been reported. Public health data reveals that cryptosporidiosis has caused substantial illness in the past; between 1992 and 2009, 23 outbreaks attributed to this parasite affected over a thousand individuals.

As the investigation continues, public health authorities are reinforcing the message that good hygiene practices are paramount in preventing such infections. Families are encouraged to remain vigilant during farm visits, ensuring that children wash their hands thoroughly after any contact with animals to mitigate the risks associated with zoonotic infections.

The outbreak serves as a stark reminder of the hidden dangers that can accompany what is often viewed as a wholesome childhood experience. As farms continue to offer opportunities for interaction with animals, an ongoing commitment to health education and rigorous hygiene practices is essential to safeguard vulnerable visitors.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
2. Paragraphs 3, 4
3. Paragraphs 4, 5
4. Paragraphs 7, 8
5. Paragraphs 4, 5, 6
6. Paragraph 8
7. Paragraphs 6, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14701017/Boy-nightmare-symptoms-petting-farm-parasite-infection-Wales.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-17707165> - Health officials are investigating an outbreak of the cryptosporidium parasite at a community farm in Cwmbran, Torfaen. Four people have tested positive for the parasite after bottle-feeding lambs and goats. The infection can lead to sickness and diarrhoea but is rarely serious for healthy individuals. Public Health Wales emphasizes the importance of thorough handwashing after contact with farm animals to prevent infection. There is no reason to avoid visiting petting farms as long as proper hygiene measures are followed.
* <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/cryptosporidium-and-open-farms/> - Public Health Wales reminds visitors to farm attractions about the importance of washing hands after contact with animals. Since April, several cases of diarrhoea potentially linked to visits to open farms have been investigated. The cause is the Cryptosporidium parasite, which can be transmitted through contact with infected animals or their faeces. Good hand hygiene is crucial in preventing infection. Visitors are advised to wash hands with warm running water and liquid soap after contact with animals.
* <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/epidemiology-and-infection/article/large-cryptosporidiosis-outbreak-associated-with-an-animal-contact-event-in-england-a-retrospective-cohort-study-2023/1B9F67694C1D40A5AA668E6118E011D2> - A retrospective cohort study investigated a large outbreak of Cryptosporidium parvum associated with a multi-day lamb petting event in south-west England in 2023. The study identified 23 laboratory-confirmed primary cases and 83 self-reported cases of cryptosporidiosis-like illness. Factors associated with illness included entering a lamb petting pen and lack of awareness of diarrhoeal and vomiting disease transmission risk on farm sites. The study highlights the importance of public health messaging and effective hygiene practices to prevent such outbreaks.
* <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/epidemiology-and-infection/article/cryptosporidiosis-outbreak-in-visitors-of-a-uk-industrycompliant-petting-farm-caused-by-a-rare-cryptosporidium-parvum-subtype-a-casecontrol-study/DC2312332B911B70884204990752A369> - A case-control study investigated an outbreak of 46 cases of cryptosporidiosis in visitors to a petting farm in England. The study found that cases were more likely to have eaten without washing their hands and less likely to have been informed of the risk of infection on arrival. An uncommon Cryptosporidium parvum subtype was identified in a lamb faecal sample and all subtyped cases. The findings highlight the importance of effective communication and hand hygiene in preventing zoonotic infections at petting farms.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3204639/> - Between 1992 and 2009, 55 outbreaks of infectious intestinal disease associated with petting farms in England and Wales were reported. Cryptosporidium spp. caused 23 of these outbreaks, affecting 1,078 persons and resulting in 29 hospitalizations. Direct contact with preweaned lambs, calves, kids, or animal feces was a contributory factor in many outbreaks. The study emphasizes the risk of zoonotic infections from petting farms and the importance of preventive measures, including thorough handwashing after animal contact.
* <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/epidemiology-and-infection/article/an-outbreak-of-cryptosporidium-parvum-linked-to-pasteurised-milk-from-a-vending-machine-in-england-a-descriptive-study-march-2021/F1DF934DBCFAAF3C330819ACF86C3C31> - An outbreak of Cryptosporidium parvum was linked to the consumption of pasteurized milk from a vending machine in rural South West England in March 2021. The study highlights the potential for under-ascertainment and underreporting of foodborne outbreaks of Cryptosporidium. While most people suffer mild to moderate diarrhea, cryptosporidiosis can cause complications and be life-threatening for immunocompromised individuals. The study underscores the importance of monitoring and controlling potential sources of Cryptosporidium infection.