

# Cryptosporidium found in supermarket pre-washed vegetables

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Cryptosporidium has been discovered in pre-washed vegetables from major supermarkets in Kent by researchers in the School of Biosciences. The research paper titled "[Presence of Cryptosporidium parvum in](#)

[pre-washed vegetables from different supermarkets in South East England: A pilot study](#)" is published by *Parasitology Research*.

The [water](#)-borne and food-borne parasite *Cryptosporidium*, which has most recently been identified for contaminating drinking water in areas of the UK, was found in over 50% of samples of pre-washed vegetables analyzed by the scientists.

*Cryptosporidium* is a parasite that causes an [infection](#) called cryptosporidiosis, affecting people and [farm animals](#) with symptoms such as diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pains and fever. *Cryptosporidium* is typically found in lakes, streams, rivers and untreated drinking water.

Cryptosporidiosis is contagious and most notably transferred from another person or animal by touching feces, or by swimming in or drinking contaminated water. While occasionally people can be infected by eating and drinking contaminated food such as unpasteurized milk, under cooked meat and offal (liver, kidneys, and heart), there was limited research into the presence of *Cryptosporidium* in pre-washed and ready to eat vegetables in the UK.

Dr. Anastasios Tsaousis, Reader in Molecular and Evolutionary Parasitology led the research and found 58% of pre-washed salad pack samples were PCR-positive for *Cryptosporidium*.

While pre-washed and ready-to-eat vegetables undergo more thorough washing with water containing chlorine disinfectants compared to unpackaged vegetables, *Cryptosporidium* particles (oocysts) are actually resistant to disinfection with chlorine and can only be reliably removed by boiling water or filtration. So, they are expected to be free from parasites and ready to eat straight from the packaging, but some oocysts remain and are likely to cause illness.

Dr. Tsaousis said, "The presence of *Cryptosporidium* in pre-washed vegetables could mean revisiting the sanitation methods employed by suppliers along the chain of production such as improved hygiene measures during harvesting, processing, packaging, transportation and storage.

"There is also a need for increased awareness among consumers on the adequate storage of vegetables and handwashing before eating."

**More information:** Aisha Jamo Suleiman et al, Presence of *Cryptosporidium parvum* in pre-washed vegetables from different supermarkets in South East England: A pilot study, *Parasitology Research* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s00436-024-08250-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00436-024-08250-w)

Provided by University of Kent

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