



Pinworms

What are Pinworms?

Pinworms are a small threadlike worm (0.25-0.5 inches long) that can live in the large intestine. Anyone can get pinworm infection, but it primarily affects children and people living in long term care facilities.

Illness caused by pinworms is a condition caused when the parasitic worms invade and live in the intestine. It is found most often in preschool and school-aged children, in primary care givers for infected children.

How are Pinworms spread?

Pinworms are spread by direct transfer of infective eggs by hand from anus to mouth of the same or another person, or indirectly through clothing, bedding, toys or other articles contaminated with parasite eggs.

Female pinworms leave the intestine through the anus and deposit their eggs on the surrounding skin. Two to three hours after the eggs are laid, they are considered to be capable of infecting others. They can survive up to two weeks on clothing, bedding or objects. Children can become infected after ingesting pinworm eggs from contaminated surfaces or fingers.

Although rare, pinworm eggs which are tiny, can also float in the air for a short period of time allowing them to be inhaled.

You do not generally need to be excluded from school or work settings when contagious with pinworms.

How are Pinworms treated?

See your physician for diagnosis and treatment recommendations. Treatment involves two doses of a medication given two weeks apart.

Medication may also be prescribed for the entire family or household.

How can Pinworms be prevented?

- Wash hands well with soap and water before food preparation, before eating, after going to the bathroom or changing diapers.
- Keep fingernails short.
- Keep fingers out of mouth and discourage nail biting as well as scratching of the anal area.
- Bathe when you wake up to reduce egg contamination.
- Change and launder underwear each day. Frequent changing of night clothes is also recommended.
- Change underwear, night clothes and sheets after each treatment.
- Linens and clothing should be handled without shaking, since shaking can spread the eggs into the air.
- Launder sheets and clothing in hot soapy water.
- Open the blinds or curtains in the bedrooms every day, since eggs are sensitive to sunlight.
- Clean the bathroom, dust and vacuum the house on a regular basis.

Symptoms of Pinworms:

- Irritability
- Anal itching
- Difficulty sleeping at night
- White threadlike adult worms near the anus may be seen at night

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CDC Public Information

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