

Pinworms FACTSHEET

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What is Pinworm Infection?

Pinworm infection is an infection of the intestinal tract caused by small white worms. Pinworms are about the length of a staple and live in the rectum of humans. While an infected person sleeps, female Pinworms leave the intestines through the anus and deposit eggs on the surrounding skin.

Who gets Pinworm Infection?

Pinworm infection is one of the most common worm infections in the United States. School-age children and pre-schoolers are infected most frequently. Infection usually occurs in more than one family member. Adults are less likely to have Pinworm infection, except mothers of infected children. Childcare centers and other institutional settings often have cases of Pinworm infection.

What are the symptoms of Pinworm Infection?

The most common symptoms of Pinworm infection are itching around the anus, disturbed sleep, and irritability. Symptoms may also include loss of appetite, restlessness, and difficulty sleeping. The symptoms are caused by the female Pinworm laying her eggs. Most symptoms of Pinworm infection are mild and many infected people have no symptoms.

How is Pinworm Infection spread?

Pinworm infection is spread person-to-person. An infected person can spread Pinworms by scratching the anal area then contaminating food or other objects that are eaten or touched by an uninfected person. An infected food handler may contaminate food or drink, especially if they do not wash their hands regularly after using the bathroom. Pinworms can also be spread if a person touches the anal area of an infected person (such as during diaper changing) or touches sheets, bedding, or other articles contaminated with the Pinworm eggs. Pinworm infection can be spread as long as either the worm or the eggs are present. Eggs can survive for up to two weeks on sheets, bedding, etc.

How is Pinworm Infection treated?

Pinworm infection can be treated with several medications. Some of these medications are available over the counter. Before treatment with an over the counter product, a physician should be consulted. The treatment involves two treatments, the last occurring two weeks after the first. An infected person should bathe each morning to remove the eggs. Also change underwear, towels and bedding frequently to decrease the chance of re-infection during treatment.

Should a child with Pinworm Infection be excluded from school?

A child with a Pinworm infection should be excluded from school until 24 hours after he/she has received the first treatment. Medical clearance by a physician will be necessary to return to school.

How can Pinworm Infection be prevented?

Pinworm infection can be prevented by the following:

- Observing proper hand washing among children and adults, especially before eating and after using the toilet, or changing a diaper
- Cleaning and disinfecting bathroom surfaces
- Changing your underwear daily. Frequent changing of night clothes is also advised
- Trimming fingernails and keep them short
- Discouraging nail-biting and scratching bare anal areas
- Machine washing bed linens and towels using hot water. Machine dry using a heat setting, not an air fluff cycle
- Vacuuming carpeted areas frequently.

Want more information?

Information about Pinworms and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call (202) 442-9371.

