



Pinworms

Pinworm infections are caused by small worms found in the human intestine. The female pinworms crawl out of the rectum at night to lay eggs on the anal area. Pinworm infection is the most common intestinal worm infection in the United States. Pinworms are most often found in preschool and school-aged children and their parents.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Enterobius vermicularis, a parasite. Pinworms are 0.25" - 0.5" long (about the length of a staple).

Symptoms

Itching of the anal or vaginal area (especially at night), irritability, and disturbed sleep. Some children will have no symptoms.

Spread

Pinworms are spread when uninfected people touch the anal area of an infected person (e.g., during diaper changing) or handle contaminated pajamas, underwear, or bedding and then touch their mouth. Spread can also occur when infected people do not wash their hands well after scratching the anal area and then touch food or other objects, which are then eaten or touched by an uninfected person. Pinworms spread human to human and do not spread to or from pets.

Incubation

It takes 2 to 8 weeks from the time a person is exposed until symptoms start.

Contagious period

As long as eggs are present. Eggs can cause infection even when they have been outside the body for as long as 2 to 3 weeks.

Exclusion

Childcare and school

None. Children do not need to be excluded with a pinworm infection.

Diagnosis

Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider if they suspect or see pinworms. The whole family may need to be examined.

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Treatment

Usually, medication is given in a single dose at the time of diagnosis and then another dose is given in two weeks. Family members and other exposed children may be treated as well.

Treatment/Control

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet, contact with the anal area, handling bedding or underclothing, and before eating or preparing food. Use a fingernail brush when washing hands. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.**
- People with pinworms should bathe every morning (a shower, if possible) using a fresh washcloth and towel.
- Discourage children from scratching or touching bare anal area and from biting their nails. Encourage children to keep their nails short.
- For several days after treatment, all bedding and underclothing should be handled carefully, should not be shaken, and should be laundered promptly.
- Thoroughly clean and sanitize shared toys, toilet seats, and baths.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 542-5230 or call your local health department.

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Updated April 2024

