

PINWORMS

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PINWORMS

Infection with pinworms occurs in all areas of the world. Pinworm is the most common worm infection in the United States. School-age children, followed by preschoolers, have the highest rates of infection. Infection often occurs in more than one family member. Adults are less likely to have pinworm infection with the exception of mothers of infected children. Child care centers, and other institutional settings often have cases of pinworm infection.

Pinworm infection is caused by a small, white intestinal worm known as *Enterobius vermicularis*. 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. Pinworm eggs are infective within a few hours after being deposited on the skin. They can survive up to 2 weeks on clothing, bedding, or other objects. You or your child can become infected after accidentally ingesting (swallowing) infective pinworm eggs from contaminated surfaces or fingers.

Symptoms: Itching around the anus, disturbed sleep, and irritability are common symptoms. If the infection is heavy, symptoms may also include loss of appetite, restlessness, and difficulty sleeping. Most symptoms of pinworm infection are mild; many infected people have no symptoms.

DIAGNOSIS

If pinworms are suspected, transparent adhesive tape (often called the “scotch tape test”) is applied to the anal region. The eggs become glued to the sticky tape and are identified by examination with a microscope. Because bathing or having a bowel movement may remove eggs, the test should be done as soon as you wake up in the morning. You may need to provide several samples to your health care provider for examination. Since scratching of the anal area is common, samples taken from under the fingernails may also contain eggs. Eggs are rarely found during lab examinations of stool or urine. At

night, the adult worms can sometimes be seen directly in bedclothes or around the anal area.

TREATMENT

Prescription or over-the-counter drugs may be used for treatment. You should consult your health care provider before treating a suspected case of pinworm. Treatment involves a two-dose course. The second dose should be given 2 weeks after the first.

IF INFECTION OCCURS AGAIN

The infected person should be treated with the same two-dose treatment. Close family contacts should also be treated. To determine source, consider playmates, schoolmates, close contacts outside the house, and household members. Each infected person should receive the usual two-dose treatment.

PREVENTION OF SPREAD OF INFECTION AND REINFECTION

- ❖ Bathe when you wake up to help reduce the egg contamination.
- ❖ Change and wash your underwear each day. Frequent changing of night clothes are recommended.
- ❖ Change underwear, night clothes, and sheets after each treatment. Because the eggs are sensitive to sunlight, open blinds or curtains in bedrooms during the day.
- ❖ Personal hygiene should include washing hands after going to the toilet, before eating and after changing diapers.
- ❖ Trim fingernails short.
- ❖ Discourage nail-biting and scratching bare anal areas. These practices help reduce the risk of continuous self re-infection.

Cleaning and vacuuming the entire house or washing sheets every day are probably not necessary or effective.