



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Pinworm

What is pinworm?

Pinworm is caused by a thin, white roundworm called *Enterobius vermicularis*, a parasite that lives in the colon and rectum of humans. Pinworm is not a serious condition; however, it can cause severe itching of the anus leading to problems sleeping at night. The itching is caused by the female pinworm laying her eggs on the surrounding skin.

How is pinworm spread?

People become infected by ingesting pinworm eggs. The eggs may be present in an infected person's stool; on the hands; or on clothing, bedding or other objects and surfaces. Pinworm eggs can also be ingested while breathing if the eggs are released into the air. A person can spread pinworm as long as the female roundworms are laying eggs on the skin. The eggs can survive for 2 – 3 weeks on items such as toys, beddings, clothing, or toilet seats. Humans are the only known hosts of pinworm.

Who is at risk for getting pinworm?

School-aged and preschool-aged children and institutionalized individuals are at the greatest risk for pinworm infestation, so outbreaks are common in these populations. Pinworm infestations are also common among caretakers and household contacts of infested individuals.

How do I know if I have pinworm?

Pinworms are diagnosed when they are seen around the anus. Transparent tape can be applied to the skin around the anus to collect eggs that may be present. The tape is then applied to a glass slide and examined under a low-power microscope. This test should be done as soon as the person wakes up in the morning before they perform any activities, such as bathing, that can remove the eggs from the

skin. It is recommended to perform this test for three consecutive mornings to increase the chances of finding pinworm eggs.

How is pinworm treated?

It is important to consult a healthcare provider before treating an individual with oral medications. Both prescription and over-the-counter medications are available. The treatment involves two doses of medication, with the second dose administered two weeks after the first dose. All household contacts and caretakers should be treated at the same time as the infested person to prevent reinfection. Bathing daily and frequent washing of clothing, towels and bedding in hot water can reduce pinworm eggs in the environment and lower the risk of reinfection. Bedding should be handled carefully to avoid releasing pinworm eggs into the air.

How is pinworm prevented?

Proper handwashing is the most effective way to prevent infection. This includes washing hands before eating or preparing food, after using the toilet and after changing a diaper. Other ways to prevent infection include trimming fingernails short and avoiding biting the fingernails and scratching the skin around the anus.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

CDC website

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/pinworm/index.html>

Kids Health website

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/stomach/pinworm.html>

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