



PINWORMS

What are PINWORMS?

Pinworms are small, white, thread-like worms that sometimes live in the colon and rectum of humans. Pinworms are about one-half inch long. While the infected person sleeps, female pinworms lay their eggs on the skin around the anus. This can cause intense itching in this area.

Who can get pinworms?

Anyone can get pinworms. It is the most common worm infection in the United States. Pinworm infection occurs most commonly among school-aged and preschool-aged children, institutionalized persons, and household members and caretakers of persons with pinworm infection.

How is pinworm infection spread?

Pinworms are spread when an infected person, most often a child, has scratched his/her bare anal area and the eggs get under the fingernails. Pinworm eggs can be spread directly from contaminated hands or indirectly through contaminated clothing, bedding, food, or other articles. Pinworm eggs can survive for 2-3 weeks on clothing, bedding or other objects.

How do I know if my child or I have pinworms?

Itching during the night in the perianal area strongly suggests infection. Diagnosis is made by identifying the worms or eggs. At night, the adult worms can sometimes be seen directly around the anal area or in the pajamas. A “tape test” can be done as soon as the person wakes up by applying a piece of transparent tape against the folds of skin around the anus to pick up any eggs or worms—then seal the tape in a plastic bag for the health care provider. The eggs or worms on the tape can be identified under a microscope.

How is pinworm infection treated?

Pinworms can be treated with either prescription or over-the-counter medications. Consult a health care provider before treating a suspect pinworm infection. Treatment involves two doses of medication. The second dose is given two weeks after the first dose. All household contacts and caretakers of the infected person should be treated at the same time. Re-infection can occur easily so strict hand washing is important. Daily morning bathing removes a large proportion of eggs; showering is preferred to avoid contaminating the bath water. Careful handling and frequent changing of under clothing, pajamas, towels and bedding can help reduce infection, reinfection and contamination of surfaces and other articles. Launder items in hot water, especially after treatment.