FACT SHEET: PINWORM

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WHAT IS A PINWORM?

A pinworm is a small (about the length of a staple), thin, white roundworm that sometimes lives in the colon and rectum. A pinworm infection (also called Enterobiasis) occurs when female pinworms leave the intestine through the anus and deposit eggs on the surrounding skin. It is the most common worm infection in the United States.

WHO CAN GET A PINWORM INFECTION?

Anyone. Pinworm infection occurs worldwide and affects people of all ages. However, it occurs most commonly in school- and pre-school-aged children, institutionalized people, and household members/caretakers of persons that care for people infected with pinworm infection.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF PINWORM INFECTION?

The most common symptom is itching around the anus, which can lead to difficulty sleeping and restlessness. Symptoms of pinworm infection usually are mild, and some infected people have no symptoms.

HOW IS PINWORM INFECTION SPREAD?

Pinworm infection is spread by the transfer of infective pinworm eggs from the anus to someone's mouth, either directly by hand contact or indirectly through contact with contaminated articles or surfaces. The eggs are deposited around the anus by the worm and can be carried to common surfaces such as hands, toys, bedding, clothing, and toilet seats. Pinworm eggs become infective within a few hours after being deposited on the skin around the anus and can survive on objects for 2 to 3 weeks. Since pinworm eggs are so small, it is possible to ingest them while breathing.

HOW IS PINWORM INFECTION DIAGNOSED?

A health care provider can diagnose pinworm infection by identifying the worm or its eggs. Worms can sometimes be seen on the skin near the anus or on underclothing, pajamas, or sheets about 2 to 3 hours after falling asleep. The adhesive side of clear, transparent cellophane tape can be pressed to the skin around the anus to collect eggs to examine for observation under a microscope (known as a "tape test").

HOW IS PINWORM INFECTION TREATED?

Pinworm infection can be treated with either prescription or non-prescription medications. A health care provider should be consulted before treating a suspected case of pinworm infection. The infected person, all household contacts, and caretakers of the infected person should be treated at the same time. Treatment includes two doses of medication, with the second dose administered two weeks after the first. The medicine kills worms but is unable to kill eggs. The second dose is crucial to prevent infection from newly hatched adult worms that were not eliminated by the first treatment because they were still in the egg stage.

HOW CAN THE SPREAD OF PINWORM INFECTION BE PREVENTED?

To prevent pinworm infection from spreading to others, becoming infected yourself, or reinfected:

- Wash hands often with soap and warm water.
- Be careful to wash hands before handling food and eating and after using the toilet or changing diapers
- Clean and disinfect bathroom surfaces
- Take showers every morning to help remove a large number of eggs on the skin
- Change underclothes frequently and bed linens first thing in the morning to prevent possible spread of eggs in the environment and risk of reinfection
- Keep fingernails clean and cut them regularly
- Frequently launder towels, night clothes, bed sheets and underclothes using hot water

SHOULD A PERSON WITH PINWORM INFECTION STAY AT HOME FROM SCHOOL/DAYCARE?

It is not necessary to keep the child at home. The child should be treated and return to school upon submitting proof that appropriate treatment has begun.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Information about pinworm and other related health topics can be found at cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit dchealth.dc.gov or call (202) 442-5865.

DC HEALTH | Center for Policy, Planning and Evaluation
Division of Epidemiology — Disease Surveillance and Investigation
2201 Shannon Place SE, 6th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20020
dchealth.dc.gov | (202) 442-5865

DC HEALTH
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