

# Pinworms



## What Are They?

Pinworms are tiny worms that commonly infect children and live in the lower intestine. The female worms (resembling short, white threads less than half an inch long) come out through the anus at night and lay their microscopic eggs around the opening.

## What Are the Symptoms?

In some people this causes intense itching; in others, nothing. Symptoms include anal itching, sleeplessness, irritability and anal irritation due to scratching. Pinworms are common in school-aged children. Pinworms do not cause teeth grinding or bedwetting and are not dangerous, just irritating.

## Who Gets Them and How?

It is estimated that five to 15 percent of people in the United States have pinworms at any one time (the rate is higher in other countries). Preschool and school-aged children frequently have pinworms, and members of an infected child's household can become infected and re-infect a treated child. Pinworms are spread when an uninfected person touches the anal area of an infected person (e.g., during diaper changing), or sheets or other articles contaminated with pinworm eggs, then touches the mouth, transferring the eggs, and swallows the eggs. An infected person can spread pinworms by scratching the anal area, then contaminating food or other objects which are then eaten or touched by uninfected persons. Pinworms can be spread as long as either worms or eggs are present. Eggs can survive up to two weeks away from a human host. People can also keep re-infecting themselves by swallowing eggs that are on their own hands.

A health care provider can make the diagnosis by asking the parent to apply the sticky side of transparent tape around the anal area so any eggs on the skin will stick to it. This is best done first thing in the morning before bathing. The tape is then placed sticky side down on a slide and examined under a microscope to see if there are any eggs.

Several medicines are available for treatment of this infection. Often the health care provider will treat the

whole family if one person in the home is infected, and will repeat treatment two weeks later.

## When Should People with this Illness Be Excluded?

Children and adults should be excluded ONLY until treatment has begun (initial dose).

## Where Should I Report It?

Notify parents and staff so that they may watch for symptoms in themselves and their children.

## How Can I Limit the Spread of Pinworms?

- In addition to following hand washing and cleanliness procedures, child care facilities should be sure each child uses only bedding and clothing that has that child's name on it.
- Each child's clothing should be stored separately in plastic bags and sent home for laundering.
- Clean and disinfect bathroom surfaces.