

PINWORMS

Pinworm infection is the most common intestinal worm infection in the United States. Pinworms are most often found in preschool and school-aged children and their parents. These small worms are found in the human intestine and crawl out of the rectum at night to lay eggs on the anal area.

CAUSE *Enterobius vermicularis*, a parasite.

SYMPTOMS Itching of the anal area (especially at night), irritability, and disturbed sleep.

SPREAD Pinworms are spread when uninfected people touch the anal area of an infected person (e.g., during diaper changing) or handle contaminated pajamas, underwear, or bedding and then touch their mouth. Spread can also occur when infected people do not wash their hands well after scratching the anal area and then touch food or other objects, which are then eaten or touched by an uninfected person. Pinworms do not come from pets – only from other people.

INCUBATION It takes 2 to 8 weeks from the time a person is exposed until symptoms start.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD As long as eggs are present. Eggs can cause infection even when they have been outside the body for as long as 2 to 3 weeks.

EXCLUSION Childcare and School: None.

DIAGNOSIS Recommend parents/guardians call their healthcare provider if they suspect pinworms. The whole family may need to be examined.

TREATMENT Usually medication is given in a single dose at the time of diagnosis and then another dose is given in two weeks.

PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet, after contact with the anal area, handling bedding or underclothing, and before eating or preparing food. Use a fingernail brush when washing hands. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.**
- Discourage children from scratching or touching bare anal area and from biting their nails. Encourage children to keep their nails short.
- For several days after treatment, all bedding and underclothing should be handled carefully, should not be shaken, and should be laundered promptly.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.