

PINWORMS

What is pinworm infection?

Pinworms are parasites that look like tiny half-inch long white threads and live in the bowel. They usually travel to the rectal opening during the night while the person is sleeping and lay eggs on the outside skin.

What are the symptoms of a pinworm infection?

The worms sometimes cause itching, which may be very annoying. If it is a severe infection, symptoms may include: nervousness, restlessness, loss of appetite, weight loss, and girls may experience vaginal itching and irritation (vaginitis), if pinworms are near the vagina.

How is pinworm infection spread?

Scratching will cause pinworm eggs to stick to the fingers. The pinworms then infect other or even re-infect the individual if the fingers are placed in the mouth. The eggs, which are too small to see, will contaminate whatever they come in contact with: bedclothes, underwear, hands and food touched by contaminated hands. Even pinworm eggs floating in the air can be swallowed and cause infection. Pinworms are very contagious. Even the cleanest and most careful people can get them.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

Pinworm eggs are infective within a few hours after being deposited on the skin. They can survive up to two (2) weeks on clothing, bedding, or other objects. The pinworms grow to adult size within two (2) to six (6) weeks. Pinworm infections can be spread as long as either worms or eggs are present.

How can pinworms infestation be prevented?

To help prevent re-infection follow these rules:

- Consult your physician to treat pinworms with medication.
- Wash hands and fingernails with soap often during the day, especially before eating and after using the toilet.
- Daily morning bathing with showers (or stand up baths) is preferred to tub baths.
- Wear clean underpants both day and night. Change them daily.
- For several days after treatment, clean the bedroom floor by vacuuming or damp mopping.
- After treatment, wash bed lines and night clothes (don't shake them". Boiling or using a washing machine set on the hot cycle can destroy eggs.
- Keep the toilet seats clean.

What should I do about it?

If you suspect a pinworm infection, consult your health-care provider for diagnosis and treatment. The treatment usually consists of one (1) tablet taken by mouth. Re-infection is possible and repeated treatment of the patient and close family contacts may be recommended two (2) weeks after initial treatment.

Children must receive treatment prior to returning to school or childcare center.

Clusters of two or more persons are considered a **reportable disease** to the Santa Rosa County Health Department (SRCHD).

For more information, please contact the SRCHD at 850-983-5200.

