

Threadworms

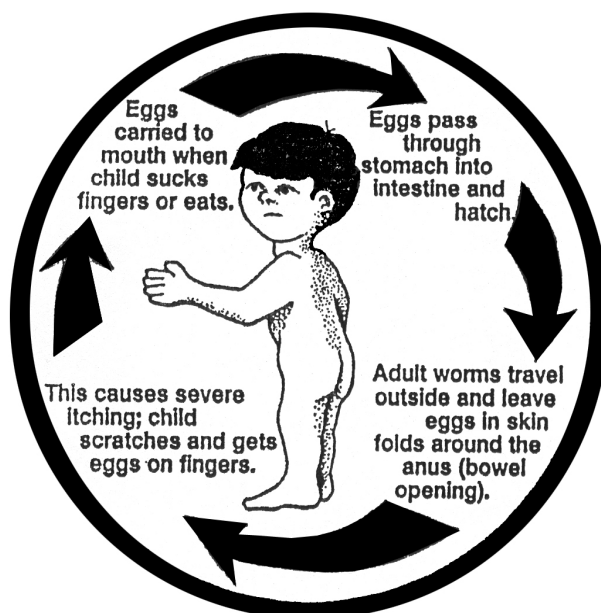
Community and Public Health

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Threadworms or pinworms (usually just called 'worms') are tiny body parasites which live in the bowel. The female worms lay their eggs in the skin folds around the anus (bowel opening) when the person is asleep and causes itching.

When the person scratches, eggs stick to the fingers which can then be put into the mouth. Once they have passed through the stomach and into the intestine the eggs hatch and the life cycle begins again, and takes 2 to 6 weeks to complete.



Life cycle of the threadworm.

What are the symptoms?

If your child tells you that they have an 'itchy bottom' or if you notice that they scratch their bottom a lot, it could be that they have threadworms.

You can find out for sure by checking for worms at night when the child is in bed. They look like tiny little pieces of white cotton around the anus.

Threadworms won't make your child feel sick or cause a serious health problem, but they do itch. However, they are very easy to catch and pass on to others. Usually it is children who get them, but adults can catch them too. When one person in a family has worms, everyone usually becomes infected.

How is it treated?

See your doctor or buy worm tablets from your pharmacy if you find worms on your child's bottom.

It is best to treat the whole family at the same time. The treatment is usually effective but it may have to be given more than once.

A little bit of lanolin on the skin folds around the anus will help ease itching. Wash hands thoroughly after applying.

How is spread prevented?

Worms are passed on by hands that have just scratched an itchy bottom, or underwear, towels and bedding used by the person with worms.

The following are some things you can do to help stop the spread:

- Make sure you and your children wash hands thoroughly before eating and after using the toilet.
- Keep your children's fingernails short and well scrubbed.
- Stop children scratching their bottoms by putting them in pyjamas or giving them cotton gloves to wear in bed.
- Wash bedclothes, pyjamas and underwear frequently.
- Clean toilet seat and toilet daily if used by someone with worms.
- Clean and vacuum the house daily for several days after treatment.



Staying away from school or preschool

Affected people can still go to work, school or preschool if they have threadworms.

For further information, contact:

- Your local doctor or practice nurse;
- Your local Public Health Nurse; or
- A Health Protection Officer at Community and Public Health.

Other resources available on childhood illnesses:

- Conjunctivitis
- Hand, foot and mouth
- Impetigo
- Ringworm
- Rotavirus
- Slapped cheek disease
- Whooping cough (Pertussis)

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