

**What are pinworms?**

Pinworms are small thread-like parasitic worms that live in the bowel or lower digestive tract of people. Usually at night they travel to the rectal opening and lay eggs on the outside skin.

**Who is at risk?**

This parasitic condition is extremely common, affecting people of all social and economic levels. Estimates indicate that 10% of the general American population is infected. People, especially preschool-age children, are the only host for these worms. Dogs, cats, and other household pets do not get pinworms although they may have other types of worms in their digestive tract.

**How do you get pinworms?**

Pinworm eggs are spread from direct transfer between hands and anus to the same person or others. Indirectly they can spread through clothing, bedding, food and other articles in the living environment. Dust may spread the eggs in heavily contaminated households and indoor environments.

**What are the symptoms of pinworms?**

They are usually harmless and produce no symptoms except severe anal itching. This itching can sometimes cause nervousness and irritability during the day and restlessness and difficulty in sleeping during the night.

**How are pinworms diagnosed?**

The best method of diagnosis is to apply cellophane tape to the skin around the anus in the morning before bathing or having a bowel movement. The eggs stick to the tape and can be observed with microscopic examination. Sometimes the worms may be visible around stool matter after going to the toilet.

**How are pinworms treated?**

There are three drugs in pill form and liquid medication to treat this condition. Contact your health care provider for the right drug for you. Change bed linen and underwear of infected person daily for several days after treatment. Treatment should be repeated after 2 weeks.

**How can pinworms be prevented?**

All members of the household should wash hands frequently using soap and warm water and at least 15 seconds of scrubbing and cleaning under fingernails especially after going to the toilet and before eating. You should also frequently clean and vacuum floors of bedrooms and bathrooms. Launder bed linen, clothing, and pajamas; dry on hot cycle. Keep toilet seats clean. Check all members of a family for the presence of eggs. Doctors may choose to treat the entire family when one member is infected.