

Pinworm Infection

What Is a Pinworm Infection?

Pinworm is an intestinal infection caused by tiny parasitic worms. It's a common infection that affects millions of people each year, particularly school age kids. If your child develops a pinworm infection, try not to worry. Pinworms don't cause any harm (just itching and restless sleep), and it won't take long to get rid of them.

How Do Pinworm Infections Spread?

Pinworm infections are contagious. Pinworms get into the body when people ingest or breathe in the microscopic pinworm eggs. These eggs can be found on contaminated hands and surfaces, such as: bed linens, towels, clothing (especially underwear and pajamas), toilets, bathroom fixtures, food, drinking glasses, eating utensils, toys, kitchen counters, desks or lunch tables at school, and sandboxes.

The eggs pass into the digestive system and hatch in the small intestine. From the small intestine, pinworm larvae go to the large intestine, where they live as parasites (with their heads attached to the inside wall of the bowel). About 1 to 2 months later, adult female pinworms travel from the large intestine to the area around the rectum. There, they will lay new pinworm eggs, which trigger itching around the anus. When someone scratches the itchy area, microscopic pinworm eggs transfer to their fingers. Contaminated fingers can then carry pinworm eggs to the mouth, where they go back into the body, or stay on various surfaces, where they can live for 2 to 3 weeks. If you're wondering if your family pet could give your child a pinworm infection, it can't. Pinworms don't come from animals.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Pinworm Infection?

The most common signs of a pinworm infection are itching around the rectum and restless sleep. The itching is usually worse at night because the worms move to the area around the rectum to lay their eggs. In girls, pinworm infection can spread to the vagina and cause a vaginal discharge. If the itching leads to broken skin, it can also lead to a bacterial skin infection. If your child has a pinworm infection, you can see worms in the anal region, especially if you look about 2 or 3 hours after your child has fallen asleep. You also might see the worms in the toilet after your child goes to the bathroom. They look like tiny pieces of white thread and are really small — about as long as a staple. You might also see them on your child's underwear in the morning. Abdominal pain and nausea are less common symptoms but can happen if there are many pinworms in the intestines.

How Are Pinworm Infections Treated?

If your child has a pinworm infection, it can be treated with over-the-counter oral medication. Albendazole (阿苯达唑 a ben da zuo) is widely available at Chinese pharmacies. This is given in one dose and repeated in 2 weeks. You may decide to treat the entire family, especially if your child has had a pinworm infection before. Although medicine takes care of the worm infection, the itching may continue for about a week. Regular hand washing and routine household cleaning (including frequent changing of underwear, and washing everyone's pajamas, towels, and bed linens) also will help prevent the spread of a pinworm infection within the family.

Can Pinworm Infections Be Prevented?

Here are a few ways to prevent pinworm infections in your family:

- Remind kids to wash their hands often, especially after using the toilet, after playing outside, and before eating.
- Make sure your kids shower or bathe every day and change underwear and swimsuits daily.
- Keep kids' fingernails short and clean.
- Tell kids not to scratch around their bottom or bite their nails.
- Wash your kids' pajamas every few days.

Source Reference: The Nemours Foundation found at: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/pinworm.html>

Have there been any cases at ISQ?

We have had recent confirmed cases, as well as suspected cases, of pinworm infections in ECC and Elementary. You may be notified privately if staff have seen your child scratch their anus or complain of itching. Please do not be offended or worry, pinworm is a common infection that is easily treated. At ISQ, we are taking extra precautions to kill any eggs that may be left in our bathrooms and learning areas, as well as continuing to stress the importance of washing hands. Please don't hesitate to contact the ISQ Health Office for any questions or concerns.