

Threadworms



What are Threadworms?

Threadworms, also known as pinworms, are tiny parasitic worms that hatch eggs in and infect the large intestine of humans. Threadworms are the most common type of worm infection in the UK and they are particularly common in young children under the age of 10.

What are the symptoms?

- Intense **itching** around the bottom (or the vagina in girls) particularly at night when the female worms are laying eggs
- Disturbed sleep as a result of the itching which can lead to irritability and loss of concentration

In some cases threadworms may be visible on bed clothes or sheets at night. They may also be noticeable in stools. The worms look like threads of white cotton about one centimetre long.

Severe or persistent threadworm infections can cause:

- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Skin infection around the rectum if bacteria enter any scratches caused by itching (wearing cotton gloves while sleeping may help prevent this)
- Difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep
- **Bedwetting**

What is the treatment for threadworms?

- Everyone in the household (even if they do not have any symptoms) will require treatment as the risk of the infection spreading is high.
- Treatment will involve a single dose of a medication called mebendazole to kill the worms.
- Another dose can be taken after two weeks if necessary.
- During treatment and for a few weeks afterwards, it is also important to follow strict hygiene measures to avoid spreading the threadworm eggs. This involves:
 - Regularly vacuuming your house
 - Thoroughly cleaning the bathroom and kitchen.
 - If an individual is pregnant, breastfeeding or very young then hygiene measures are usually recommended without medication.

Is it infectious?

Yes, threadworms lay their eggs around an infected person's bottom, usually at night. Along with the eggs, the worm also secretes mucus that causes itching.

If the eggs get stuck on the person's fingertips when they scratch, they can be transferred to their mouth or onto surfaces and clothes. Other people who touch an infected surface can then transfer the eggs to their mouth.

What is the incubation period?

Threadworm eggs can survive for up to three weeks before hatching. If the eggs hatch around the anus, the newly born worms can re-enter the bowel. Eggs that have been swallowed will hatch inside the intestine. After two weeks the worms reach adult size and begin to reproduce, starting the cycle again.

How can spread be prevented?

Re-infection is common and infectious eggs are also spread to others directly on fingers or indirectly on bedding, clothing and environmental dust. It is not always possible to prevent a threadworm infection, but the risk can be significantly reduced by always maintaining good hygiene.



- Treatment can be obtained from pharmacies but if affected individuals are pregnant, breastfeeding or children are under two years old then they will need to see their GP.
- Exclusion is not required for threadworm but parents should be encouraged to inform the school of a diagnosis.
- Good hand hygiene is essential, particularly after going to the toilet and before mealtimes.
- Staff should wear personal protective equipment such as gloves when changing nappies or taking the child to the toilet. Hands should be washed after gloves are removed.
- Toys and other 'high contact' areas such as desks and door handles should be cleaned regularly.
- Fingernails should be kept short
- Affected individuals should be encouraged to wear pajamas or pants to bed
- Encouraging affected individuals not to scratch the affected area around their bottom or vagina as this will help prevent re-infection and reduce the risk of the infection spreading to other people
- Kitchen and bathroom surfaces should be kept clean.

More information on threadworm can be found in chapter nine of the **Health protection in schools and childcare facilities** guidance.