

THREADWORMS

What are they?

Threadworms are tiny white worms, the adult worm is about 1 centimetre long, white and with a blunt head and a fine, hair like pointed tail. They live in the bowel. They are not harmful themselves but may be a nuisance. They are common especially in children but can affect people of any age. They can only be found in humans and do not come from pets.

How do I know someone has them?

The most common symptom is itching around the back passage (anus) at night. This is because the worms are most active at night. This may lead to disturbed sleep or infection where the person has been scratching. Sometimes a child might wake in the night with severe perineal pain, which can be relieved by placing the child in a bath. An infected person may have no symptoms but sometimes worms can be seen in the stool or on toilet paper.

Are they infectious?

Yes. They can often be passed around within families. Threadworms leave the bowel at night and lay eggs on the skin around the back passage. The eggs frequently cause itchiness. Eggs may get onto the hands or under the finger nails of the person infected through scratching the itchy area and because of inadequate handwashing after using a toilet. The person may then pass them on to an uninfected person, for example through food handling. Eggs can also get onto carpets, bed linen, towels, flannels and into household dust and be passed to other people in this way.

What is the incubation period?

It may be between 2 and 6 weeks after contact with a source of infection before the life cycle is complete and eggs are laid in the newly infected person.

Is there any treatment?

Yes. There are medicines (powder, syrup or tablets) which will get rid of the worms and which your GP can prescribe for you or which can be bought at the chemist. **It is important that all people living in the same household are treated at the same time as it is quite likely they will be infected as well.**

There are several things you can do to help get rid of worms:

- A morning bath will remove eggs laid during the night
- Wash hands after using the toilet and before preparing food
- Make sure everyone in the family uses their own towel and wash cloth
- During treatment change the night clothes, underwear and bed sheets of the person with the infection as often as possible
- Vacuum the carpets often
- Keep the nails of the person with the infection short

Do you need to stay off school or work?

- Once an infection is found it should be treated immediately, but it is not necessary to stay off school or work.
- The school should be informed of any threadworm infection so that they can take steps to limit the spread of infection.