

THREADWORMS

Threadworms (also called pinworms) are tiny worms that can infect your large intestine (gut). Anyone can get threadworms, but they are common in children under 10 years old. Threadworms cause intense itching around the anus (or vagina in girls). The itching can interrupt sleep.

Threadworms are white, 2 to 13mm long and look like small pieces of thread. If you or your child has an itchy bottom then check for threadworms in your or their poo. Female threadworms lay their eggs around the anus, usually at night. Look for worms that have hatched out around the anus; do this in the late evening, using a torch.

The sticky liquid (mucus) in which female threadworms lay their eggs makes the anus itchy. A child with threadworms who scratches their bottom may collect eggs on their fingers or under their nails. These eggs may spread to anything they then touch. If they suck their fingers, the eggs they swallow can hatch in their gut and grow into adult worms which means the cycle of threadworm infection will continue.

How can I treat threadworms?

If you or your child have threadworms you can usually treat the infection yourself. Ask your pharmacist to recommend a treatment. Treat everyone in your household at the same time, even if they don't have symptoms.

Use **mebendazole** to kill threadworms in the gut. Take one chewable tablet or a 5ml liquid dose, and repeat the dose again after 2 weeks. Don't take mebendazole if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, and don't give it to a child under 6 months old. Check with your pharmacist that mebendazole treatment is suitable for you or your child.

Mebendazole does not kill threadworm eggs. As well as taking mebendazole you must use hygiene measures to get rid of the threadworm eggs in your home and avoid spreading them. If mebendazole treatment is not suitable for you, use hygiene measures alone.

Hygiene measures

On day 1:

- Wash your child's and your bedclothes, sheets, pillow cases, duvet covers, towels and soft toys at normal temperatures and rinse them well.
- Vacuum all the rooms in your house, especially the bedrooms. Vacuum the bed mattresses.
- Dust the rooms with a damp cloth – especially the bathroom and kitchen. Rinse the cloth in hot water as you dust and throw it away when you've finished using it. Don't shake clothes and bedding because they might have threadworm eggs on them.

For 2 weeks (if you have taken mebendazole) or for 6 weeks (if you're not taking mebendazole) everyone in your household should:

- Wear close-fitting underpants or knickers at night. Change them every morning.
- Bath or shower every morning as soon as they get up. Wash around the anus to get rid of any eggs laid during the night.
- For babies younger than 6 months: clean their bottom gently but well, at every nappy change. Wash your hands before and after each nappy change.

You may want your child to try wearing cotton gloves in bed, to stop them scratching during the night. Wash the gloves every day.

All the time, everyone in the family should:

- Wash their hands and scrub under their nails first thing in the morning, after using the toilet or changing nappies, and before eating or cooking.
- Try not to bite their nails or suck their fingers. Keep their fingernails short.
- Don't share towels or flannels.
- Keep toothbrushes in a closed cupboard and rinse them well before use.
- Don't eat in the bedroom.

Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, and you don't want to treat your threadworms with hygiene measures alone.

Can I give threadworms to other people?

Yes, if you don't wash your hands carefully, you may spread threadworm eggs to anything you touch.

Threadworm eggs can survive for 2 weeks outside the gut. Eggs that drop off the anus and on to your clothes or other surfaces can spread easily. For example, someone else may touch a surface with eggs on it, and then touch their mouth. If you shake bedding, threadworm eggs can get into the air. They may land on food or toothbrushes.

Take hygiene measures (see treatment section) to avoid giving threadworms to other people, and to avoid re-infecting yourself.

Can I give threadworms to my pet?

No, you can't give threadworms to your pet. But if you stroke your pet when you have threadworms, you may leave threadworm eggs on your pet's fur. These eggs could spread to other people if they also stroke your pet.

Does my child need to stay away from school or nursery?

No, your child can go to school or nursery as usual. Tell the staff at your child's school or nursery about the threadworms, so they can take steps to stop the infection spreading.

Where can I find further information?

Patient UK: www.patient.info

NHS Direct Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.