

Patient Information Leaflet

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for practice news and information



Threadworms

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www.nhs.uk or www.patient.co.uk

Threadworms

Threadworms are the most common type of worm infection in the UK, and they are particularly common in young children. They are white and look like a small piece of cotton thread hence the name. You may notice them around your child's bottom where they lay their eggs especially at night or in your or your child's stools (poo). The worm also secretes mucus that causes itching around the anus or entrance to vagina usually worse at night. 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. Threadworm eggs can survive for up to three weeks before hatching.

You can treat threadworms yourself with medication available at pharmacies. However, treatment does not kill the eggs hatched by threadworms. Good hygiene is the only way to prevent the eggs from spreading and causing further infection.

Threadworms are spread from person-to-person as a result of poor hygiene. The entire household should be treated and ensure thorough hygiene for six weeks (this is how long the worms live) to prevent re-infection. Prevention can be achieved by always maintaining good hygiene. Children should wash their hands regularly, particularly after going to the toilet and before mealtimes. Kitchen and bathroom surfaces should be kept clean.

Strict hygiene measures can be used to clear up a threadworm infection and reduce the likelihood of re-infection. Everyone in the household must follow the advice. Wash all night clothes, bed linen, towels and soft toys as soon as threadworms are suspected.

Thoroughly vacuum and dust the whole house regularly. Carefully clean the bathroom and kitchen by damp-dusting surfaces and washing the cloth frequently in hot water. Avoid shaking any material that may be contaminated with eggs, such as clothing or bed sheets to prevent transfer to other surfaces. Keep your fingernails clean and short. Discourage nail-biting and sucking fingers or thumbs. Wash your hands frequently and scrub under your fingernails, particularly before eating, after going to the toilet and before and after changing your baby's nappy. Bath or shower regularly, particularly first thing in the morning to remove any eggs. Don't share towels.

Medication can be used to treat threadworms and can be bought over the counter from your local pharmacy. Everyone in the household should be treated, even if they don't have any symptoms. The medications are 90%-100% effective at killing the threadworms, but they don't kill the eggs. Therefore, the hygiene measures outlined above should be followed for two weeks after treatment.

Mebendazole is the preferred treatment for children over two years old. It is available as a chewable tablet or as a liquid. As threadworm re-infections are very common, a second dose may be taken after two weeks.

Piperazine paralyses the threadworms. It is usually combined with senna, which has a laxative effect to expel the worms more quickly. It can be used to treat children between the ages of three months and two years old. A second dose may be taken after two weeks. (Piperazine is not recommended if you have epilepsy or problems with your liver or kidneys).

Babies under 3 months of age, pregnant or breastfeeding mothers should use the hygiene method.