

PINWORMS

What is a pinworm?

A pinworm is a white, very thin worm about ¼ inch long that moves. If it doesn't wiggle, it's probably lint or a thread. Pinworms usually are seen in the anal and buttocks area, especially at night or early in the morning. Sometimes a pinworm is found on the surface of a bowel movement. More than 10% of children have pinworms. They do not cause any serious health problems. However, they can cause much itching and irritation of the anal area and bottom.

How do I check for pinworms?

If your child has itching or irritation of the anal area, he could have pinworms. Keep in mind that many get itching in this area around the anus using a flashlight. Do this a few hours after your child goes to bed and first thing in the morning for two consecutive nights. If no pinworm is seen, do a Scotch tape test for pinworm eggs.

Instructions for Scotch tape test

1. Pick up glass slides at your physician's office (2 for each child) and write your child's name on the slides.
2. Touch the sticky side of the piece of clear Scotch tape to the skin on both sides of the anus. Do this in the morning soon after your child has awakened and before any bath or shower.
3. Stick the piece of tape onto a slide. Do this 2 mornings in a row. Bring the slides to your physician's office for examination with a microscope.

Your physician will call you to give you the results. If pinworm eggs are seen on the slides, your physician will prescribe a medication.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Anti-pinworm medicine**

If you have definitely seen a pinworm, your child needs to be treated with medicine prescribed by your physician.

- **Treatment of other family members for pinworm**

Children are usually infected by children outside the family. If anyone else in your family has itching and irritation in the anal area, or anyone sleeps with your child, call your physician during office hours for instructions. Your physician will determine if it is necessary for everyone in the family to be treated. If any of your child's friends have similar symptoms, be sure to tell their parents to get them tested. Dogs and cats do not carry pinworms.

What if my child was exposed to another child with pinworms?

If your child has had recent contact with a child who has pinworms but has no symptoms, your child probably won't get them. Pinworms are harmless and are never present very long without causing some anal itching. If you want to be sure your child doesn't have pinworms, wait at least a month. A swallowed egg will not mature into an adult pinworm for 3 to 4 weeks. Then contact your physician about doing a Scotch tape test for pinworm eggs.

How can I help prevent pinworms?

Infection is caused by swallowing pinworm eggs. Your child can get pinworms no matter how carefully you keep your child and your house clean. The following hygiene measures, however, can help to reduce the chances of reinfection of your child or new infections in other people.

- Have your child scrub his hands and fingernails thoroughly before each meal and after each use of the toilet. Keep the fingernails cut short because eggs can collect under the nails. Discourage thumbsucking and nail biting.
- Vacuum or wet mop your child's entire room once a week because any eggs scattered on the floor are infectious for 1 to 3 weeks.
- Machine-washing in warm water will kill any eggs present in clothing or bedding.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call during office hours if:

- The skin around the anus becomes red or tender (strep bacteria have a special affinity for this site).
- The anal itching does not stop within 1 week after treatment
- You have other concerns or questions