Pinworms (Enterobius vermicularis)

Pinworm Facts
- A pinworm, also known as “threadworm”, is a small thin white worm that sometimes lives in the colon and rectum of humans.
- Pinworms are small but visible to the naked eye, about the length of a staple.
- Female worms crawl out of the rectum (bum) at night and lay their eggs on the surrounding skin.
- Pinworms are unpleasant and uncomfortable but they do not cause disease.

What are the symptoms of pinworm infection?
- The most common symptom is itching around the anus and vagina.
- In severe cases, the itching can lead to difficulty sleeping, restlessness, grinding teeth at night, loss of appetite and anxiety.
- Many people do not have any symptoms.

Who is at risk for pinworm infection?
- Pinworm infection occurs worldwide and affects people of all ages.
- Pinworm infection occurs most commonly among:
  - School-aged and preschool-aged children,
  - Institutionalized people, and
  - Household members and caretakers of people with pinworm infection.

How does pinworm infection spread?
- Pinworm infection is spread:
  - When an infected person scratches the itchy area and gets the pinworm eggs on their fingers or under their finger nails and touches another person’s mouth.
  - When the eggs get onto objects, such as toys, toilet seats or baths, clothes or bedding. By sharing these objects, other people can pick up the eggs on their hands and then put them in their mouth.
  - Pinworm eggs become infective within a few hours after falling off the skin and can survive for up to 3 weeks on clothing, bedding, or other objects.
What can I do to prevent the spread of pinworm?

To help prevent the spread of pinworm:

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water after using the toilet, changing diapers and before handling food.
- Infected people should bathe in the morning to help remove a large number of eggs from the skin.
- Change underclothes and bedding in the morning to prevent spreading the eggs in the environment. Eggs remain infective in the environment for 2-3 weeks. Do not shake out these items and place carefully in the washer and dryer to kill any eggs that may be there.
- Cut fingernails frequently and try not to bite your nails.
- In institutions, day care centres, and schools, control of pinworm can be difficult, but mass use of medication during an outbreak can be successful. Teach children the importance of washing hands to prevent infection. (Source: www.cdc.gov/parasites/pinworm/prevent.html).

What should I do if I think I might be infected with pinworms?

- Talk to your health care provider if you think you or a family member might have a pinworm infection.

How is pinworm diagnosed?

- Diagnosis is usually made when adult worms are seen in the area around the bum. It is best to check 2-3 hours after the child is asleep.
- Transparent tape can also be applied to the skin around the bum to collect any eggs that may be present. The tape will be examined under a microscope for the presence of eggs. Three samples, collected in the morning, for three days in a row is recommended.
- Very few eggs are present in stool so stool samples are not recommended.

How is pinworm treated?

- For information about treating pinworm infection, speak with your health care provider.