

# Worms: threadworm

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## Description

Many worms worldwide can infect humans. In Australia, threadworm (*Enterobius vermicularis*, also called pinworm) is the most common worm in children; other worms include roundworms, hookworms and tapeworms. Threadworms are white, thread-like worms that are 2–13 mm long. They can infect people of any age. Domestic pets are not a source of infection.

People get worms by swallowing worm eggs. The eggs hatch, and the worms live in the intestines. When a female worm is ready to lay her eggs, she comes out of the infected person's anus and lays her eggs on the skin around the opening, causing itching.

## How do they spread?

Worm eggs are picked up and transferred to the mouth when infected people scratch their anus and then touch their mouth, or do not wash their hands after going to the toilet. The eggs can also spread to bedding, clothes and other surfaces, where other people can pick them up. Eggs can survive on surfaces for up to 2 weeks.

## Incubation period

The incubation period is around 4–5 weeks.

## Infectious period

People are infectious for as long as they are infested with worms. The infestation will continue until the person is treated. People do not become immune to threadworms.

## Exclusion period

Exclusion is not necessary.

## Responsibilities of educators and other staff

- Make sure staff and children practise effective hand hygiene.
- Ensure that appropriate cleaning practices are being followed in the education and care service.

## Responsibilities of parents

- Encourage effective hand hygiene at home.
- Keep children's fingernails short.
- Change bed linen and underwear daily for several days after treatment. Washing clothes and bed linen in hot water will kill threadworm eggs.

## Controlling the spread of infection

- Ensure that staff practise effective hand hygiene.
- Ensure that appropriate cleaning practices are being followed.

## Treatment

Worm treatments are available over the counter from your chemist. Treatment usually involves a single dose for the infected person and each family member.