THREADWORMS

What are they?

Threadworms are tiny white worms which live in the bowel. They are not harmful to themselves but may be a nuisance. They are common especially in children but can affect people of any age. They do not come from pets.

How do I know someone has them?

The most common symptom is itching around the back passage (anus) at night. This is because the worms are most active at night. This may lead to disturbed sleep or infection where a person has been scratching. An infected person may have no symptoms but sometimes worms can be seen in the stool or on the toilet paper.

Are they infectious?

Yes. They can often be passed around within families. Threadworms leave the bowel at night and lay eggs on the skin around the back passage. The eggs frequently cause itchiness. Eggs may get onto the hands or under the fingernails of the person infected through scratching of the itchy area and because of inadequate hand washing after using the toilet. That person may then pass on to an uninfected person, for example through food handling. Eggs can also get onto carpets, bed linen, towels, facecloths and into household dust and be passed to other people in this way.

What is the incubation period?

It may be between 2 and 6 weeks after contact with a source of infection before the life cycle is completed and eggs are laid in the newly infected person.

Is there any treatment?

Yes. There are medicines (powder, syrup or tablets) to get rid of the worms which your doctor will prescribe for you, or which can be bought at the chemist. It is important that all people living in the same household are treated at the same time as it is quite likely they will be infected as well. There are several things you can do to help get rid of worms:

- A morning bath will remove eggs laid at night.
- Wash hands after using the toilet and before preparing or eating food.
- Make sure everyone in the family uses their own towel and washcloth.
- During treatment change the night clothes, underwear and bedsheets of the person with the infection as often as possible.
- Vacuum the carpets often
- Keep the nails of the person with the infection short.
- In order to prevent threadworms wash hands as above and keep toilet and toilet area clean.
- Discuss with your doctor about possible further treatment about two weeks after the first treatment.

How soon can you return to school or work?

As soon as they have received treatment.