What to do if your child has pinworms

- All family members should be treated at the same time.
- Children can get worms again, even when they have been treated because the worms lay eggs around their bottoms. The area becomes very itchy, and by scratching children can get the worm eggs under their fingernails, then carry them back to their mouths, giving themselves another bout of worms or spreading them to other people.
- They need to be taught not to touch or scratch around their bottoms where there are likely to be worm eggs.
- Keep fingernails short and well scrubbed.
- Ointments or creams used for nappy rashes such as zinc and castor oil, smeared around the anus at bed time and in the morning may help with itching.
- Get children to sleep in underpants or pyjamas and wash all their underpants in hot water.
- Wash clothes, pyjamas, sheets and pillow cases in hot water. Do not shake the sheets when you take them off the bed.
- Disinfect the toilet seat often with antiseptic cleaner.

For more information contact:

- Local Community Child Health Nurse
- Local Family Doctor
- Ngala Family Resource Centre Helpline 8.00 a.m. - 8.00 p.m. 7 days a week Telephone (08) 9368 9368 Outside metro area - Freecall 1800 111 546 www.ngala.com.au
- Parent Help Centre/Parenting line Telephone (08) 9272 1466 (24 hour service) Outside metro area - Freecall 1800 654 432

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The infection will go on until the pinworms are treated. People do not get immune to pinworms.

Dogs or cats do not get pinworms, so pets do not cause pinworms in humans.

However children can get different worms from animals, so it is important to ‘worm’ animals regularly for their own health and for the health of the family.

Human infestation with other worms such as roundworms, hookworms and tapeworms (including the hydatid tapeworm) is not common in Australia.

Most worms that infest humans in other parts of the world need some time in water, soil or other animals before they become infectious, so that travellers are unlikely to pass these worms onto other people in temperate parts of Australia.

Diagnosis of worms other than pinworms requires special tests, and advice from a doctor should be sought. Treatment varies with the type of worm and the symptoms.

‘Ringworm’, a skin rash, is not caused by worms. It is caused by a fungus called tinea.

Most families with young children have had to deal with worms from time to time. Although parents are often embarrassed if their children have worms, they are very common and usually not difficult to treat.

The name ‘Pinworm’ is used throughout this text however they may also be called Threadworms.

### Worms affecting people in Australia

- Worldwide there are many worms that can affect humans, but in most parts of Australia only the pinworm, (Enterobius vermicularis) is common. The pinworm is a type of roundworm or nematode.

- Adults as well as children can get pinworms.

- About one month after the egg of the pinworm is swallowed, the adult worm comes out of the child’s bottom (anus) and lays her eggs on the skin around the opening causing very bad itching. Scratching or not washing hands after going to the toilet can result in the eggs being carried on the hands back to the mouth, when another cycle of worm production begins.

- The eggs can also be moved onto clothing, bedding, and other surfaces, where other people can pick them up. The eggs can survive up to two weeks on surfaces.

### Signs and symptoms

- The main sign of pinworms is an itchy bottom. Sometimes children feel ‘out of sorts’ and do not want to eat much.

- Pinworms do not cause major health problems, and are usually not the cause of tummy pain.

- Scratching of the bottom can cause a red rash around the anus, which can sometimes become infected.

- In girls they can move into the vagina, causing itching and a vaginal discharge.

- Occasionally adult worms can be seen on a person’s poo.

- If you look carefully at the child’s bottom, around the opening (anus), you can sometimes see the worms there, especially when the child first gets up in the morning.

### What parents can do

- It is important to see your doctor if you suspect your child has worms so the doctor can be sure of what is causing the problem.

- The test to see if the problem is pinworms is to briefly place a piece of adhesive tape (‘sticky tape’) across the anus. This will pick up the pinworm eggs, and the doctor can look for these on the tape.

- Treatment of pinworms worms is safe and works well.

- A single dose of medicine (such as Vermox** or Combantrin**), is given to all family members, not only the child, and needs to be repeated after two weeks.

**Any products referred to in our health topics are usually well-known brands readily available in Australia. The brand names are given as examples only, and do not necessarily represent the best products, not the full range of effective products on the market.