

# Worms

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Many types of worms can infect people. In Australia, threadworm (also called pinworm) is the most common worm in children, but worms can infect people of any age. Threadworms are small, white, thread-like worms that are 2 to 13 millimetres long. The worms only infect humans, so children cannot catch threadworms from pets.

Other types of worms include roundworms, hookworms and tapeworms. One type of tapeworm, called hydatids, can cause hydatid disease. In people, the baby hydatids live inside fluid-filled balls called cysts that can grow in many different parts of the body, but mostly in the liver and lungs. Hydatid disease is more common in rural communities where dogs and livestock interact.

## How it spreads

### Threadworms

People get threadworms by swallowing worm eggs. Worm eggs are picked up and transferred to the mouth when an infected person scratches their bottom and then touches their mouth, or when they do not wash their hands properly after going to the toilet. This keeps this infection going. The eggs can also be transferred to bedding, clothes and other surfaces, where other people can pick them up. Eggs can survive on surfaces for up to 2 weeks.

### Hydatids

In Australia, people mostly get hydatids from infected dogs, but dingoes and foxes can also spread the infection. Animals such as sheep, goats, cattle and kangaroos spread the infection to dogs. People get infected by swallowing eggs passed in the faeces (poo) of an infected dog. This may happen when a person handles infected dogs, or things soiled with infected dog droppings, and then touches their mouth. They can also get infected if they swallow food or water contaminated with dog droppings.

Hydatid disease does not spread directly from person to person, and a person cannot get infected by eating the meat of infected sheep or cattle.

## Exclusion period

Not excluded – people with worms can attend the service.

## Actions for educators and other staff

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene, especially after touching animals and before preparing or eating food.

Ensure any dogs that visit the service are regularly treated for worms.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

## Actions for parents and carers

To minimise the chance of your child getting any kind of worms, make sure they wash their hands thoroughly and often. This is especially important after going to the toilet or touching animals, and before eating.

### Threadworms

- You can get a threadworm treatment from your pharmacy. Treat all family members. Follow the directions on the label.
- Change bed linen and underwear daily for several days after treatment. Wash clothes and bed linen in hot water to kill threadworm eggs.
- Keep children's fingernails short.

### Hydatids

Prevention is important as treatment can be complicated.

- Regularly treat your dog for worms.
- Do not let dogs lick people on the face.
- Dispose of dog droppings regularly, wearing gloves.
- Do not feed dogs raw offal meat (such as liver or kidneys) because this is how they can become infected.

## More information about worms

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of worms ([healthdirect.gov.au/worms-in-humans](http://healthdirect.gov.au/worms-in-humans)).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker ([healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker](http://healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker))
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022