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## *Pinworms*

Pinworm infection is a common problem among children in day care or school. The most common symptom is intense rectal itching. Girls may have vaginal itching. The worms are acquired from another person, usually by transference of the small pinworm eggs which may be present in the fingernails of someone who has been itching. The worms will be visible near the anus at night or in the early morning.

The best treatment is a chewable tablet called Vermox (mebendazole), available by prescription. Each member of the family older than age two should take one tablet, followed by a second tablet two weeks later. This is a very effective treatment, but reinfection from another untreated child is very common. Control of this infection in a day care center may be difficult.

### **Pinworms - Getting Rid of the Itch**

Pinworms are commonly found in preschool and school aged children and often occur in more than one family member. If your child has pinworms, he or she may show symptoms of anal itching, irritability and disturbed sleep. Pinworms look like white threads, a third of an inch long. They live in the lower intestine, but come out of the anus at night or in the early morning hours to lay their eggs in the area between the buttocks. This is when most of the itching occurs.

Pinworms are spread through the transmission of eggs by hand from anus to mouth, or indirectly, in food, dust, or other articles. The eggs can survive up to two weeks outside the body. Once these eggs are swallowed, they hatch in the small intestine and migrate down. Human beings cannot and do not catch pinworms from animals. A diagnosis of pinworms is made by applying a piece of transparent tape, like scotch tape, to the area just outside of the anus and between the buttocks; making a slide with what the tape picks up; and then examining the slide under a microscope. The sample is best taken with the tape in the morning before your child takes a bath or has a stool.

If you suspect your child has pinworms, call our office for an appointment. The good news is that pinworm infection, though very annoying, is not generally serious and is easily cured with medication. However, reinfection is very common.

To minimize this and to prevent the pinworms from spreading to others, you can take the following precautions. Encourage your child not to scratch, despite the itching. Keep fingernails clean and trimmed. Have your child wash his or her hands with warm soapy water by rubbing the hands together quickly for at least 10 seconds after going to the bathroom. Launder bedding and toys. Vacuum often and discourage your child from eating food that has fallen on the floor.

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