



Hookworm

Disease Fact Sheet

What is hookworm infection?

Hookworm is an intestinal parasite of humans. The larvae and adult worms live in the small intestine and can cause intestinal disease.

Who gets hookworm infection?

People living in areas with warm, moist climates where sanitation and hygiene are poor are at risk for hookworm infection if they walk barefoot or in other ways allow their skin to have direct contact with contaminated soil. Children who play in contaminated soil may also be at risk.

How is hookworm spread?

Hookworm is not spread directly from person to person. Hookworm eggs are passed in the feces of an infected person. If an infected person defecates outside (near bushes, in a garden, or field) or if the feces from an infected person are used as fertilizer, eggs are deposited on soil. They can then mature and hatch, releasing larvae (immature worms). The larvae mature into a form that can penetrate the skin of humans. Hookworm infection is transmitted primarily by walking barefoot on contaminated soil.

What are the symptoms of hookworm?

Itching and a localized rash are often the first signs of infection. These symptoms occur when the larvae penetrate the skin. A person with a light infection may have no symptoms. A person with a heavy infection may experience abdominal pain, diarrhea, loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue and anemia. A prolonged heavy infection may affect the physical and cognitive growth of children.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may develop from a few weeks to many months after exposure, depending on the intensity of the infection and the iron intake of the person infected.

How is hookworm diagnosed?

Infection is confirmed in a medical laboratory by finding the microscopic hookworm eggs in the feces (stool).

What is the treatment for hookworm infection?

Hookworm infections are generally treated for 1 to 3 days with medication prescribed by your health care provider. The drugs are effective and appear to have few side effects. Iron supplements may be prescribed if you have anemia.

How can hookworm be prevented?

Hookworm can be prevented by improving general sanitary conditions, especially by installing sanitary disposal systems for feces. Night soil (soil containing human feces) and sewage effluent are dangerous to use as fertilizer. Shoes should be worn when walking in areas where hookworm disease is common.