Ascaris Infection
Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS AN ASCARIS INFECTION?
Ascaris is a worm that lives in the small intestine. Infection with Ascaris is called ascariasis. Adult female worms can grow over 12 inches (30 cm) in length, adult male worms are smaller.

HOW COMMON IS ASCARIASIS?
Ascariasis is the most common human worm infection. Infection occurs worldwide. It is most common in tropical and subtropical areas where sanitation and hygiene are poor, temperatures are warm, and the climate is humid. Children are infected more often than adults.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF AN ASCARIS INFECTION?
Most people have no symptoms that are noticeable, but infection in children may cause slower than normal growth and weight gain. If you or your child are heavily infected, you may have abdominal pain. Sometimes, when immature worms migrate through the lungs, a person may cough and have difficulty breathing. If an individual has a very large amount of worms, their intestines may become blocked.

HOW IS AN ASCARIS INFECTION SPREAD?
Ascaris eggs are found in human feces. After feces contaminate the soil, the eggs become infectious after a few weeks. Infection occurs when a person accidentally swallows infectious Ascaris eggs. Once swallowed, immature worms (*larvae*) hatch from the eggs, penetrate through the intestine, and are carried by the bloodstream through the lungs and then to the throat where they are swallowed. Once swallowed, they again reach the intestines and develop into adult worms. Adult female worms lay eggs that are then passed in feces. This cycle from egg ingestion to new egg production takes about 2 months.

HOW CAN I GET ASCARIASIS?
You or your children can become infected after touching your mouth with your hands that have become contaminated with eggs from soil or other contaminated surfaces or by ingesting contaminated food or water.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE ASCARIASIS?
See your health care provider.

HOW IS DIAGNOSIS OF ASCARIS MADE?
Your health care provider will ask you to provide stool samples for testing. Some people notice infection when a worm is passed in their stool or is coughed up. If this happens, bring in the worm specimen to your health care provider for diagnosis. There is no blood test used to diagnose an Ascaris infection.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR ASCARIASIS?
Ascaris infections are generally treated for 1-3 days with medication prescribed by your health care provider. The drugs are effective and appear to have few side effects. Your caregiver will likely request additional stool exams 1 to 2 weeks after therapy. If the infection is still present, treatment will be repeated.

I AM PREGNANT AND HAVE JUST BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH ASCARIASIS - CAN I BE TREATED?
Infection with Ascaris worms is generally light and is not considered an emergency. Unless your infection is heavy, and your health may be at risk, treatment is generally postponed until after delivery of the baby.

HOW CAN I PREVENT INFECTION WITH ASCARIS?
- Avoid contacting soil that may be contaminated with human feces.

- Do not defecate outdoors.
- Dispose of diapers properly.
- Wash hands with soap and water before handling food.
- When traveling to countries where sanitation and hygiene are poor, avoid water or food that may be contaminated.
- Wash, peel or cook all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.

SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT SPREADING INFECTION TO THE REST OF MY HOUSEHOLD?

No. Infection is not spread from person to person.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have a parasitic infection, consult a health care provider.

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