

What is trichinosis?

Trichinellosis, also called trichinosis (TRICK-a-NO-sis), is caused by eating raw or undercooked pork and wild game products infected with the larvae of a species of worm called *Trichinella*. Infection occurs worldwide, but is most common in areas where raw or undercooked pork, such as ham or sausage, is eaten.

What are the symptoms of trichinosis?

Nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, fatigue, fever, and abdominal discomfort are the first symptoms of trichinellosis. Headaches, fevers, chills, cough, eye swelling, aching joints and muscle pains, itchy skin, diarrhea, or constipation follow the first symptoms. If the infection is heavy, patients may experience difficulty coordinating movements, and have heart and breathing problems. In severe cases, death can occur. In mild to moderate infections, most symptoms subside within a few months. Fatigue, weakness, and intermittent muscle aches may last for months.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Abdominal symptoms can occur 1 – 2 days after infection. Later symptoms usually start 2 - 8 weeks after eating contaminated meat. Symptoms may range from very mild to severe, and relate to the number of infectious worms consumed. Often, mild cases of trichinellosis are not specifically diagnosed, and are assumed to be the flu or other common illnesses.

How is trichinosis spread?

When a human or animal eats meat that contains infective *Trichinella* cysts, the acid in the stomach dissolves the hard covering of the cyst and releases the worms. The worms pass into the small intestine and, in 1-2 days, become mature. After mating, adult females lay eggs. Eggs develop into immature worms, which penetrate the wall of the intestine, travel through the arteries, and are transported to muscles. Within the muscles, the worms curl into balls, and encyst (become enclosed in a capsule). Infection occurs when these encysted worms are consumed in meat.

Who gets trichinosis?

If you eat raw or undercooked meats, particularly pork, bear, wild feline (such as a cougar), fox, dog, wolf, horse, seal, or walrus, you are at risk for trichinellosis.

How long is a person infectious?

Infection can only occur by eating raw or undercooked meat containing *Trichinella* worms. It is not spread from person to person.

What is the treatment for this illness?

Several safe and effective prescription drugs are available. Treatment should begin as soon as possible, and the decision to treat is based upon symptoms, exposure to raw or undercooked meat, and laboratory test results.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

No. Infection can only occur by eating raw or undercooked meat containing the worms.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of these worms?

- Cook meat products until the juices run clear, or to an internal temperature of 170 ° F.
- Freeze pork less than 6 inches thick for 20 days at 5 ° F to kill any worms.
- Cook wild game meat thoroughly. Freezing wild game meats, even for long periods of time, may not effectively kill all worms.
- Cook all meat fed to pigs or other wild animals.
- Do not allow hogs to eat uncooked carcasses of other animals, including rats, which may be infected.
- Clean meat grinders thoroughly after preparing ground meats.
- Curing (salting), drying, smoking, or microwaving meat does not consistently kill the worms.