

# Worms in humans

Some types of worms can infect people. Some can be caught in Ireland and others are only caught abroad. Most worm infections are not serious and can be easily treated with medicine.

## A pharmacist can help with worm infections

A pharmacist can help if you have:

- small, white worms in your poo that look like pieces of thread
- extreme itching around your anus, particularly at night

These are probably [threadworms](#).

They're common in Ireland and can be treated with medicine from a pharmacy.

### Contact your GP if you:

- find a large worm or large piece of worm in your poo
- have a red, itchy worm-shaped rash on your skin
- have sickness, diarrhoea or a stomach ache for longer than 2 weeks
- are losing weight for no reason

These could be symptoms of something like roundworm, hookworm or tapeworm.

These infections are usually caught while travelling. They can take a long time to cause symptoms. Tell your GP if you have been abroad in the last 2 years.

► [See what different worms look like](#)

## Treatment to get rid of worms

It does not matter which type of worm you have. All worm infections are treated in a similar way.

You might be asked to provide a sample of poo so it can be tested for worm eggs.

If you have worms, your GP will prescribe medicine to kill them. You take this for 1 to 3 days. The people you live with may also need to be treated.

Any worms in your gut will eventually pass out in your poo. You may not notice this.

To avoid becoming infected again or infecting others, it's very important during the weeks after starting treatment to wash your hands:

- after going to the toilet
- before eating or preparing food
- often during the day

Go back to your GP if your symptoms do not get better in 2 weeks or you keep passing live worms in your poo.

## How you catch worms

Worms are mainly spread in small bits of poo from people with a worm infection. Some are caught from food.

You can get infected by:

- touching objects or surfaces with worm eggs on them – if someone with worms does not wash their hands
- touching soil or swallowing water or food with worm eggs in it – mainly a risk in parts of the world without modern toilets or sewage systems
- walking barefoot on soil containing worms – this is a risk in parts of the world without modern toilets or sewage systems
- eating raw or undercooked beef, pork or freshwater fish containing worms – this is more common in parts of the world with poor food hygiene standards

You can catch some worms from pets, but this is rare.

## How to prevent worm infections

### Do

- ✓ wash your hands before eating or preparing food, and after touching soil or using the toilet
- ✓ only drink bottled or boiled water in high-risk areas (places without modern toilets or sewage systems)
- ✓ deworm pet dogs and cats often
- ✓ dispose of dog and cat poo in a bin as soon as possible

- ✓ wash garden-grown fruit and vegetables well

## Don't

- ✗ do not let children play in areas where there's a lot of dog or cat poo
- ✗ do not eat raw fruit and vegetables in high-risk areas
- ✗ do not walk barefoot in high-risk areas
- ✗ do not eat raw or undercooked pork, beef or freshwater fish

Content supplied by the [NHS](#) and adapted for Ireland by the HSE

Page last reviewed: 15 April 2021

Next review due: 15 April 2024

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 123.

## HSE Live - we're here to help

Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm

Saturday: 9am to 5pm

Sunday: Closed

Bank holidays: Closed

Freephone: [1800 700 700](tel:1800700700)

From outside Ireland: [00 353 1 240 8787](tel:0035312408787)

[HSE Facebook](#)

[HSE Instagram](#)

[HSE TikTok](#)

[HSE YouTube](#)

[HSE LinkedIn](#)

[HSE X \(Twitter\)](#)

[Complaints and feedback](#)

[Emergencies](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Cookie statement](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy statement](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

© Health Service Executive