



Do you have a question on parenting or concerns about your child's health and wellness? Write to us at meera@mediaprima.com.my and our experienced paediatricians will respond to your queries. All questions must be accompanied by the sender's full name and contact details.

Worm infections

Dear Doctor,

IS de-worming still necessary for children these days? I remember being given deworming medicine as a child growing up in the 1970s but I'm not sure whether it's a requirement for children today. What would be the signs that a child is in need of de-worming?

Faridah Ibrahim, Petaling Jaya

ANSWER

WORM infections are very common and spread easily. They often don't have symptoms and are often under-reported.

There are different types of worm infections. Pinworms (also called threadworms) are a common kind that affect young children. Hookworms, roundworms and whipworm infections are also common.

Children get worms when they come into contact with infected soil in playgrounds or during outdoor play. When they put their hands into their mouths such as for thumb sucking, the worms or eggs will go into their intestine. Touching pets or their excrement infected with worms is another common way to get worm infestation.

Very often, a worm infestation does not show symptoms or the symptoms may be so slight and gradual that they are overlooked. It is one of the leading causes of stomach ache in children.

Depending on the type of worm infection and the severity of the infection, a child with worms may have some common signs or symptoms, like a sore tummy, weight loss, loss of appetite, irritability, nausea or vomiting, itching or pain around the anus. Very rarely if there are many worms, there can be a blockage of the intestines.

If left untreated, they can become severe, as the worms can lead to intestinal bleeding. This can then lead to malnutrition, weight loss and complications like anaemia. Infected children then become more vulnerable to illness, as their immune systems are damaged.

If the condition persists, the worm infection can also harm the infected child's physical and

intellectual development, delaying growth and affecting cognitive function, especially if it results in anaemia and malnutrition.

The treatment of worm infection is quite simple and often involves a course of anti-parasitic medicine. Don't buy over-the-counter medicines or herbal remedies, as some anti-worm medicines may

be unsuitable for children less than 2 years old. You may also be tempted to try alternative medicines like herbal remedies but there isn't any evidence proving their effectiveness. It is best to obtain professional advice from your physician.

The World Health Organisation recommends that preschool children receive regular deworming treatments every six months after they turn one.

Here are a few things you can do to keep your child safe from worm infections:

- Always ensure that your child plays in a clean, dry area.
- Keep your toilet clean.
- If your child is old enough, teach him to wash hands after going to the toilet every time.
- Always drink boil or filtered water.
- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly in clean water.
- Cook meat and fish thoroughly, till there are no raw bits.

You can always speak to your doctor for more information and the required treatment.



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