



Echinococcus multilocularis Infection

What is it?

- A parasitic infection caused by ingesting eggs of the *Echinococcus multilocularis* tapeworm.
- Once the eggs are inside the body, they develop into a larval form which grows as multiple masses (cysts) within the body.
- Once cysts begin to form in the body, the person develops a serious disease called alveolar echinococcosis.
- Cysts usually begin in the liver and develop into solid tumor-like masses. The parasite can later spread and cause growths in other organs like the spleen, lungs, and brain.

How is it spread?

- Eggs are passed in the stool of foxes, coyotes, wolves, dogs, or cats that have eaten infected rodents.
- Humans can ingest the eggs after eating or encountering things that are contaminated with the stool of these animals.
- Eggs can also be present on the fur of animals if the fur is soiled with stool.

What are the symptoms?

- During the early stages (5-15 years) there are usually no symptoms.
- If symptoms do occur, they may include tiredness, weight loss, abdominal discomfort, and weakness.
- In the later stages, symptoms may mimic those of liver cancer or cirrhosis and include abdominal swelling, malnutrition, yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice), and mental confusion.
- If left untreated, alveolar echinococcosis can lead to death.

When do symptoms start?

- Symptoms usually start 5 – 15 years after someone has become infected.

How long is it contagious?

- In the environment, eggs of the parasite remain infective for approximately one year in lower temperatures and when in a wet environment.
- Humans cannot spread the parasite to other humans.

How is it treated?

- All individuals with the infection will need treatment.
- Treatment often involves a combination of surgery and chemotherapy.

How is it prevented?

- Anyone who handles wild dogs, or their carcasses, should wear plastic gloves and complete hand hygiene after glove removal.
- Wash all wild-picked fruits and vegetables carefully before cooking or eating.
- All dogs and cats that have access to wild rodents should be dewormed monthly.
- Pet owners should try to avoid allowing cats and dogs to eat wild rodents.
- Regular and frequent hand washing after handling pets and their stool, and before handling food.
- Areas where infected dogs/cats frequently visit should be cleaned and disinfected well and often (e.g., pet beds, floors, carpets, and car interiors).

Should I go to childcare, school or work?

- Yes. A human cannot pass the parasite to other humans.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) Program at 705-474-1400 or toll free at 1-800-563-2808, ext. 5229.



References:

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