



Trichinosis

(Trichinellosis, Trichiniasis)

What is trichinosis?

Trichinosis is a foodborne disease caused by the larvae of a tiny parasitic roundworm called *Trichinella spiralis*. These roundworms can infect and damage many body tissues, first passing through the intestinal tract and then spreading to muscle tissues, where the majority of them persist. In very rare cases, the disease can be fatal. Anyone who eats undercooked meat from infected animals can develop trichinosis. Pork products are implicated more often than other meats.

What are the symptoms of trichinosis?

Symptoms usually start with abdominal pain and diarrhea, followed by fever, muscle soreness, and pain and swelling around the eyes. Thirst, profuse sweating, chills, weakness and tiredness may develop. If the infection is severe, the person may have difficulty co-ordinating their movements and may experience heart and breathing problems.

The period between consuming the parasite and the beginning of symptoms varies depending upon the number of parasites in the meat and the amount eaten. It can range from five to 45 days, but is usually eight to 15 days.

How is trichinosis spread?

Animals such as pigs, cats, rats and many wild animals including foxes, wolves, moose, bears and polar bears harbour the parasite in their muscle tissue. The worm is spread when infected animal flesh is ingested by other animals. When humans eat infected pork that has been improperly cooked, they become infected. Improperly cooked wild animal meat may also be responsible for infecting humans. Person-to-person spread does not occur.

What can be done to prevent the spread of trichinosis?

- Ensure that pork and wild game meat products are properly cooked to an internal temperature of at least 71°C (160F). Note that curing (salting), drying, smoking or microwaving meat does not consistently kill infective worms
- Store infected meat in a freezer with a temperature of -25°C or lower for 10 days or -15°C for 30 days to destroy the parasite
- Thoroughly clean utensils used for processing pork and wild game meat before using them for other meats

How is trichinosis treated?

Most cases of trichinosis are mild enough that the person will recover on their own. If symptoms persist or become more severe, the person should see a physician for treatment.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca