

# Trichinosis

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is trichinosis?

Trichinosis (trik-in-oh-sis) is an infection caused by eating raw or undercooked meat from pork or wild game animals which are infected with the larvae of a parasite called *Trichinella spiralis*. Infection occurs commonly in certain wild carnivorous (meat-eating) animals but may also occur in domestic pigs.

### Who gets trichinosis?

Anyone who eats undercooked meat of infected animals can develop trichinosis. Raw or undercooked pork, such as ham or sausage, is the most frequent source. Improperly cooked wild animal meat, such as bear, may also be responsible for infecting humans.

### What are the symptoms of trichinosis?

Symptoms range from mild to severe depending on how many parasites the person swallowed. The first symptoms of infection may include:

- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever

Symptoms that may occur later in the infection include:

- Headaches
- Fevers
- Chills
- Cough
- Eye swelling
- Aching joints
- Muscle pains
- Itchy skin

If the infection is significant, people may experience problems with movement as well as breathing and heart problems. In very severe cases, death may occur.

Abdominal symptoms of trichinosis, which are usually among the first symptoms, can occur 1 to 2 days after infection. Further symptoms usually occur 8 to 15 days after infection. The amount of time that it takes for symptoms to appear depends on how many parasites were swallowed by the person.

### How is trichinosis diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects trichinosis, samples of the patient's blood and muscles may be examined.

## **What is the treatment for trichinosis?**

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

## **How is trichinosis spread?**

Animals such as pigs, rats, dogs and many wild animals (including fox, wolves, wild boars and bear) may harbor the parasite. When people eat infected pork that has been improperly cooked, they become infected. Improperly cooked wild animal meat may also be responsible for infecting people. Trichinosis is not spread from person to person.

## **What can be done to prevent trichinosis?**

The best prevention is properly cooking all meat. The following are good general guidelines:

- Cook meat products until the juices run clear or reach an internal temperature of 170° F.
- Freeze pork (less than 6 inches thick) for 20 days at 5°F to kill any *Trichinella* parasites.
- Cook wild game meat thoroughly. Freezing wild game meats, even for long periods of time, may not kill all *Trichinella* parasites.
- Cook all meat fed to pigs or other wild animals.
- Do not allow pigs to eat uncooked meat of other animals, including rats, which may be infected with *Trichinella* parasites.
- Clean meat grinders thoroughly if you prepare your own ground meats.
- Curing (salting), drying, smoking, or microwaving meat does not always kill *Trichinella* parasites.
- Anyone with diarrhea should not prepare food for others.

## **Where can I get more information on trichinosis?**

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health <http://www.nj.gov/health>
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov>

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.