DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
Division of Public Health

Frequently Asked Questions

TRICHINOSIS

What is trichinosis?
The larvae of a species of worm called *Trichinella* causes trichinosis when people or animals eat raw or undercooked infected meat. The infection, also called trichinellosis, occurs commonly in certain wild meat-eating animals such as bear or cougar and certain (meat and plant-eating) animals such as domestic pigs or wild boar.

Who gets trichinosis?
Anyone who eats raw or undercooked meat from infected animals can develop trichinosis. You get the infection by eating the immature form of the roundworm (larvae) in raw or undercooked meat. Trichinosis infection is relatively rare in the United States.

How is trichinosis spread?
People can become infected with trichinosis from consuming raw or undercooked meat that contains the roundworm larvae. It is most commonly found in wild game meat such as bear, fox, dog, wolf, horse, seal, and walrus and less commonly in pork. After the meat with the parasite larvae is eaten, the larvae grow into worms in the intestines, which reproduce and make larvae that go into the bloodstream. Person-to-person spread does not occur.

What are the symptoms of trichinosis?
The signs, symptoms, severity, and duration of trichinosis vary. Nausea, diarrhea (loose stools), vomiting, fatigue, fever, and abdominal discomfort are often the first symptoms. Headaches, fevers, chills, cough, swelling of the face and eyes, aching joints and muscle pains, itchy skin, diarrhea, or constipation may follow. If the infection is severe, individuals may experience difficulty coordinating movements and have heart and breathing problems, and death can occur. For mild to moderate infections, most symptoms subside within a few months. Fatigue, weakness, muscle pain, and diarrhea may last for months.

How soon do symptoms appear?
Abdominal symptoms can occur one to two days after infection. Further symptoms usually start two to eight weeks after eating contaminated meat. Symptoms may range from very mild to severe and relate to the number of infectious worms consumed in the meat. Often, mild cases of trichinosis are never specifically diagnosed and are assumed to be the flu or other common illnesses.

DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
Division of Public Health

Frequently Asked Questions

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?
It is not required to exclude an infected person from work or school. Infection can only occur by eating raw or undercooked meat containing *Trichinella* worms.

What is the treatment for trichinosis?
Several safe and effective prescription drugs are available to treat trichinosis. Treatment should begin as soon as possible and should be based upon symptoms, exposure to raw or undercooked meat, and laboratory test results.

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of trichinosis?

- The best way to prevent trichinosis is to cook meat to safe temperatures. A food thermometer should be used to measure the internal temperature of cooked meat. Do not sample meat until it is cooked.
- Curing (salting), drying, smoking, or microwaving meat alone does not consistently kill infective worms.
- Freeze pork less than six inches thick for 20 days at 5 degrees Fahrenheit (-15 degrees Celsius) to kill any *Trichinella* worms.
- Freezing wild game meats, unlike freezing pork products, may not effectively kill all worms because some worm species that infect wild game animals are freeze-resistant. Thoroughly cooking wild game will decrease risk of transmission.
- Clean meat grinders thoroughly after each use.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/trichinellosis/gen_info/faqs.html#spread_others