



## **Trichinellosis (Trichinosis) Fact Sheet**

(Source: CDC: [http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/trichinellosis/gen\\_info/faqs.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/trichinellosis/gen_info/faqs.html))

### **What is Trichinellosis, also called trichinosis?**

Trichinellosis, also called trichinosis, is caused by eating raw or undercooked pork and wild game products infected with the larvae of a species of worm called *Trichinella*. Infection occurs worldwide. In Alaska, trichinellosis is mainly associated with eating undercooked meat from bears, walruses, or seals.

### **What are the symptoms of a trichinellosis infection?**

Nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, fatigue, fever, and abdominal discomfort are the first symptoms of trichinellosis. Headaches, fevers, chills, cough, eye swelling, aching joints and muscle pains, itchy skin, diarrhea, or constipation follow the first symptoms. If the infection is heavy, patients may experience difficulty coordinating movements, and have heart and breathing problems. In severe cases, death can occur. For mild to moderate infections, most symptoms subside within a few months. Fatigue, weakness, and diarrhea may last for months.

### **How soon after infection will symptoms appear?**

Abdominal symptoms can occur 1-2 days after infection. Further symptoms usually start 2-8 weeks after eating contaminated meat. Symptoms may range from very mild to severe and relate to the number of infectious worms consumed in meat. Often, mild cases of trichinellosis are never specifically diagnosed and are assumed to be common illnesses.

### **How does infection occur in humans and animals?**

When a human or animal eats meat that contains infective *Trichinella* cysts, the acid in the stomach dissolves the hard covering of the cyst and releases the worms. The worms pass into the small intestine and, in 1-2 days, become mature. After mating, adult females lay eggs. Eggs develop into immature worms, travel through the arteries, and are transported to muscles. Within the muscles, the worms curl into a ball and encyst (become enclosed in a capsule). Infection occurs when these encysted worms are consumed in meat.

### **Am I at risk for trichinellosis?**

If you eat raw or undercooked meats, particularly pork, bear, wild feline (such as a cougar), fox, dog, wolf, horse, seal, or walrus, you are at risk for trichinellosis. It's also important to ensure that items, i.e., cutting boards, knives, etc. that come into contact with the raw meats are thoroughly cleaned so they cannot contaminate other foods.

### **Can I spread trichinellosis to others?**

No. Infection can only occur by eating raw or undercooked meat containing *Trichinella* worms.

### **What should I do if I think I have trichinellosis?**

See your healthcare provider who can order tests and treat symptoms of trichinellosis infection. You should tell your health care provider if you have eaten raw or undercooked meat.

### **How is trichinellosis infection diagnosed?**

Most commonly a blood test can show if you have trichinellosis.

### **How is trichinellosis infection treated?**

Persons should discuss treatment decisions with their health care provider.

### **Is trichinellosis common?**

Infection used to be more common and was usually caused by ingestion of undercooked pork. However, infection is now relatively rare. During 2008–2010, 20 cases were reported per year on average. The number of cases decreased beginning in the mid-20th century because of legislation prohibiting the feeding of raw-meat garbage to hogs, commercial and home freezing of pork, and the public awareness of the danger of eating raw or undercooked pork products. Cases are less commonly associated with pork products and more often associated with eating raw or undercooked wild game meats. In Alaska, there has been a yearly average of less than two cases for the past 10 years.

### **How can I prevent trichinellosis?**

- Cook meats until the juices run clear or to an internal temperature of 170° F.
- Freeze pork less than 6 inches thick for 20 days at 5° F to kill any worms.
- Cook wild game meat thoroughly. *Freezing wild game meats, unlike freezing pork products, even for long periods of time, will not effectively kill all worms.*
- Cook all meat fed to pigs or other wild animals.
- Clean meat grinders thoroughly if you prepare your own ground meats.
- Curing (salting), drying, smoking, or microwaving meat does not consistently kill infective worms.

### **For more information:**

See the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/trichinellosis/index.html>