WHAT IS IT?
- Threadworm, also known as pinworm, is a small intestinal worm parasite.
- This small, white, thread-like worm measures 2–13mm in length.
- Threadworms are passed from human to human.
- Adult female threadworms lay a large number of eggs.
- Eggs are usually laid at night when female threadworms wriggle outside the anus.
- Eggs are laid outside the anus and in females can also be laid around the vagina and urethra.

HOW COMMON IS IT?
- Threadworm is a common human infestation.
- It is more prevalent in preschool children than in adults.
- There is a high risk of threadworm being passed between family members and a medium risk of it passing between nursery and school friends.

SYMPTOMS
- Intense itching around the anus.
- In females there may be irritation around the vulval area.
- Itching is worse at night and can disturb sleep.

DIAGNOSIS
- Threadworms can be seen in the perianal area or in the stools and they can appear as white wiggling threads.
- The eggs are too small to be seen by the naked eye.
- Adhesive tape can be applied to the perianal area first thing in the morning. When put under a microscope, the eggs of the threadworm can be seen.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?
- The numerous eggs of the threadworm are laid along with mucus, which irritates the skin.
- The infected person scratches the anal area. Eggs get caught under the fingernails.
- Reinfection occurs when nail-biting or eating transfer the eggs back into the digestive tract.
- Digestive juices in the upper GI tract allow new worms to develop.
- It takes around two weeks for ingested eggs to grow into larvae and become mature threadworms.
- The eggs can live for up to two weeks on nightwear and bedding.
- The worms live for up to six weeks.

PREVENTION
- There is a high risk of infection between family members.
- All family members should be treated with prophylactic medication and must take the following hygienic measures:
  - Washing hands after going to the toilet;
  - Wearing close-fitting underpants to prevent scratching at night;
  - Showering the anal area every morning;
  - Young children can wear cotton gloves at night;
  - Keeping fingernails short;
  - Washing hands and scrubbing under the fingernails first thing in the morning;
  - Vacuuming all carpets is advisable because eggs can survive for up to two weeks on clothing, bedding or other objects.

TREATMENT
- Drug treatment is recommended for the infected person and all family members at the same time.
- Over-the-counter medicines are available for the treatment of threadworm.
- Mebendazole can be used in adults and children over two years.
- Piperazine, which includes a laxative, can be used from the age of three months.
- Drug treatment will kill the worms but is not effective against the eggs.
- Both treatments can be repeated after two weeks if reinfection occurs.
- Children with threadworm do not need to be excluded from school (Health Protection Agency, 2003).
- Drug treatment is not recommended in women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. If hygienic measures are carefully followed for six weeks, preventing reinfection, then the life cycle will be broken.

REFERENCES

WEBSITES
Health Protection Agency: www.hpa.org.uk
NHS Direct: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk