

What is trichinosis?

Trichinosis, also called trichinellosis, is an infection caused by the roundworm *Trichinella*. In the first half of the 20th century, several hundred cases occurred annually in the United States. Following eradication programs in the domestic pork industry, trichinosis became rare in the U.S., with most cases associated with eating wild game. Between 1997-2004, fewer than 11 cases a year on average have been reported in the U.S. Trichinosis is rare in Oklahoma as well; only two cases have been reported to the Oklahoma State Department of Health since 1978.

How is trichinosis spread?

People become infected with *trichinella* worms by eating raw or undercooked meats from animals infected with the worm. In the U.S., eating raw or undercooked game, such as wild boar, bear, and cougar, is most often the cause of infection in people. However, travelers to foreign countries with inadequate trichinosis control programs should avoid eating undercooked pork and pork products, such as sausage. Outbreaks have occurred in Europe from infected horsemeat. Persons with trichinosis do not spread the infection to others.

What are the symptoms of trichinosis?

Trichinella infections can range from a mild flu-like illness to a severe, potentially fatal disease. The sudden appearance of muscle soreness and pain along with swelling of the upper eyelids are characteristic early signs of trichinosis. Headache, fever, sensitivity to light, thirst, sweating, chills, cough, and itchy skin are other possible symptoms. Persons with severe disease may experience difficulty coordinating movements, and may develop heart and breathing problems. Most symptoms are mild or moderate in severity and will resolve within a few months. However, diarrhea, weakness, and fatigue may last longer.

How soon after infection will symptoms appear?

Stomach problems may begin within a few days, but the characteristic symptoms begin 5-45 days after eating infected meat, in most cases occurring within 8-15 days.

How is trichinosis diagnosed?

A blood test or muscle biopsy, performed by a physician, is used to diagnose trichinosis.

Can I spread trichinosis to others?

No. Infection can only occur by eating raw or undercooked meat containing *Trichinella* worms. The worms are present in infected animals for months, and their meat can cause infection unless cooked, frozen, or irradiated to kill larvae.

Is there treatment for trichinosis?

Trichinosis can be treated effectively with several prescription drugs. Treatment should begin as soon as symptoms are suspected, due to trichinosis.

What can be done to prevent trichinosis?

1. Cook potentially infected meat products until no longer pink inside or to an internal temperature of 160° F.
2. Freeze pork less than 6 inches thick for 30 days at 5° F to kill worms.
3. Cook wild game thoroughly. Unlike species found in pork, some *Trichinella* in wild animals can survive freezing.
4. Do not allow hogs to eat uncooked carcasses of other animals, including rats, which may be infected with trichinosis.
5. Clean meat grinders thoroughly between each use and avoid mixing ground meats from different animals.

