

Whipworm infection: Unraveling the impact of trichuriasis.

Annette Nejsum*

Department of Pure and Applied Biology, Imperial College, London UK.

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Description

Whipworm infection, also known as trichuriasis, is a neglected tropical disease caused by the parasitic roundworm *Trichuris trichiura*. It affects millions of people worldwide, particularly in areas with inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene practices. This article delves into the causes, transmission, clinical manifestations, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention strategies related to whipworm infection [1].

Causes and transmission

Whipworm infection occurs when individuals ingest the eggs of *Trichuris trichiura*, usually through the consumption of food or water contaminated with fecal matter containing the parasite's eggs. The eggs hatch in the small intestine and the larvae mature in the large intestine, where they attach to the intestinal wall and reproduce. The eggs are then passed in the stool, perpetuating the cycle of infection.

Transmission is facilitated by unsanitary conditions, lack of proper sanitation facilities, open defecation, and poor hygiene practices. Areas with inadequate waste disposal systems and limited access to clean water are particularly susceptible to the spread of whipworm infection.

Whipworm infection can manifest with a spectrum of clinical presentations, ranging from asymptomatic to moderate or severe symptoms. The severity of the infection is influenced by the worm burden and the individual's immune response [2]. Common clinical manifestations include:

Gastrointestinal symptoms: Individuals may experience abdominal pain, diarrhea and frequent passage of loose or bloody stools. Chronic infection can lead to mal absorption, weight loss, and stunted growth in children.

Iron deficiency anemia: Whipworm infection can cause iron deficiency anemia due to chronic intestinal bleeding caused by the worms' attachment and feeding on the intestinal mucosa.

Rectal prolapse: In severe cases, particularly among children, chronic whipworm infection can lead to rectal prolapse, a condition where the rectum protrudes through the anus [3].

Diagnosis

The diagnosis of whipworm infection involves a combination of clinical evaluation, laboratory tests, and examination of stool samples.

Microscopic examination: Stool samples are examined under a microscope to detect the presence of whipworm eggs. The characteristic barrel shaped eggs with polar plugs are indicative of whipworm infection.

Serological tests: Serological assays, such as Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA), detect specific antibodies against *Trichuris* antigens. However, serological tests are primarily used for research purposes and not routine diagnosis [4].

Treatment

The treatment of whipworm infection involves the administration of anthelmintic drugs, such as albendazole or mebendazole. These medications effectively kill the adult worms, allowing for their expulsion from the body. In cases of severe anemia or malnutrition, additional treatments, including iron supplementation and nutritional support, may be necessary.

Prevention strategies

Preventing whipworm infection requires a comprehensive approach that focuses on improving sanitation, promoting hygiene practices and community education.

Improved sanitation: Access to safe and clean sanitation facilities, including latrines and toilets, helps minimize environmental contamination with whipworm eggs and larvae.

Hygiene education: Promoting proper hygiene practices, such as regular hand washing with soap and water, particularly before handling food and educating communities about the importance of avoiding fecal-oral transmission [5].

Access to clean water: Ensuring access to clean and safe drinking water reduces the risk of ingesting whipworm eggs through contaminated water sources.

Deworming programs: Implementing mass deworming programs in endemic areas, particularly targeting school aged children, helps reduce the burden of infection and prevent complications.

Health education: Raising awareness among communities, healthcare professionals and educators about the risks of whipworm infection and the importance of preventive measures.

Conclusion

Whipworm infection, caused by the parasitic roundworm *Trichuris trichiura*, remains a significant public health concern in many regions worldwide. Inadequate sanitation, poor hygiene practices and limited access to clean water contribute to the spread of this neglected tropical disease. Effective prevention and control strategies, including improved sanitation, hygiene education, deworming programs and access to clean water, are crucial for reducing the prevalence and impact of whipworm infection. By implementing comprehensive preventive measures and raising awareness about the importance of sanitation and hygiene, we can work towards eliminating whipworm infection and improving the health and well-being of affected communities worldwide.

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*Correspondence to

Annette Nejsum

Department of Pure and Applied Biology,

Imperial College,

London,

UK

E-mail: annettenejsum@gmail.com