Trichinosis

Trichinosis is a foodborne parasitic infection caused by an intestinal round worm called Trichinella spiralis. After ingestion the larvae move to the persons muscles and become contained in them. The illness can be highly variable and can range from a mild infection to a fatal disease depending on the number of larvae consumed.

How is Trichinosis transmitted?

Swine, dogs, cats, horses, rats and wild animals such as bear, wolf, fox and wild bear can have the parasite present. It is transmitted by eating raw or undercooked meats of these animals that contain the Trichinella larvae, in particular pork, pork products and beef products. It is not transmitted from person to person.

What are the symptoms?

The person may be asymptomatic or have nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea during the first week after eating infected meat. Then as the larvae move to the muscles approximately two to eight weeks later, the person may develop fever, muscle pain, swelling around the eyes, a rash and eye hemorrhages. Heart and neurological complications may develop in the third to sixth week.

How is Trichinosis diagnosed and what is the treatment?

Diagnosis can be confirmed with blood tests and muscle biopsy. Treatment is under the direction of the health care provider, but usually infections are treated with anthelminthic drugs which are drugs used to treat worms. Steroids may be indicated in severe cases.

How can Trichinosis be prevented?

All meat products especially pork and wild game should be cooked thoroughly.

All pork and pork products should be cooked to an internal temperature of 71 degrees C.

Properly clean all utensils including meat grinders, chopping boards and knifes after use.

Garbage should not be fed to swine.