



Soil-Transmitted Helminth Infections: Factsheet

Parasitic worm infections are among the most widespread neglected tropical diseases, affecting **more than 1.5 billion people worldwide**, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and other tropical regions.

One group of these infections includes **soil-transmitted helminth (STH) infections** – intestinal worm infections that disproportionately affect children and are closely linked to inadequate sanitation.

What Causes Soil-Transmitted Helminth Infections?

STH infections are caused by intestinal worms, mainly whipworm, roundworm and hookworms. These worms live in the intestine and release eggs that contaminate soil in areas with poor sanitation.



How Is It Transmitted?

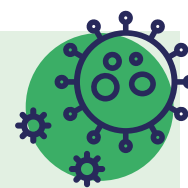
Unlike filarial infections such as onchocerciasis, loiasis, or mansonellosis, STH infections are **not transmitted by insects**.

Transmission occurs when people ingest worm eggs from **contaminated soil, food, or water** or when larvae penetrate the **skin**.

In areas with poor sanitation, eggs/larvae contaminate the soil and enter the body when:

- Vegetables are eaten without proper washing, cooking, or peeling
- Contaminated water is consumed
- Children play in contaminated soil and put unwashed hands in their mouths
- Walking barefoot on contaminated soil

Warm temperatures, adequate moisture and protection from direct sunlight ensure that eggs and larvae remain infectious in the soil, making rural tropical and subtropical regions particularly affected.



Who Is Affected?

- STH infections are among the **most common infections worldwide**.
- The highest infection intensity occurs in **children aged 5–15 years**.
- Infection intensity and frequency typically decline in adulthood.
- STH infections are widely distributed throughout the **tropics and subtropics**, particularly in areas with limited sanitation infrastructure.



What Happens in the Body?

Intestinal worms can cause a range of symptoms, including:

- Diarrhoea
- Abdominal pain
- General weakness and malaise
- Nutritional deficiencies

Hookworm infections can cause **chronic intestinal blood loss**, leading to **anaemia**, especially in children and pregnant women.

In heavily affected communities, repeated infections can **impair growth and development** of children.



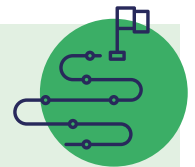
Current Treatment

The World Health Organization recommends **albendazole (400 mg)** or **mebendazole (500 mg)** for treatment. These medicines are inexpensive, and can be safely administered in community settings, including schools. While those treatments are effective for Ascaris roundworm infections, they have a limited efficacy for whipworm and hookworm infections.



Remaining Challenges

- Reinfection is common in areas with poor sanitation
- High treatment coverage must be sustained
- Sanitation improvements are essential for long-term control



We at eWHORM are generating the clinical evidence needed to support the registration of oxfendazole (OXF) as a broad-spectrum treatment for multiple worm infections, including soil-transmitted helminth infections. This would be a major step toward achieving WHO's 2030 goals to eliminate filarial and soil-transmitted helminth infections and strengthen health systems in endemic countries.



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