# Let's Talk ABOUT...

Pinworms are very thin, white worms ¼ to ½ inch long. They are an infection in the intestines. You usually see them around the anus and buttocks. The infection is harmless and more than one out of 5 of elementary school children have them.

To become infected with pinworms, children must get some of the tiny eggs in their mouth. The eggs can be carried under fingernails or transferred to objects such as toys, clothing, bedding, or even playground soil. Inside the body, the eggs grow into adult pinworms in three to four weeks. The female adults move and put their eggs outside the anus.

### What happens?

Most children complain of nighttime or early morning itching around the anus. The itching may come from the infection or an allergy to the worms. Itchiness can cause loss of sleep, restlessness, irritability, and a lack of concentration. Constant scratching may cause the skin to be infected.

#### How do I know if it is pinworms?

You can check your child's anus when he complains or is most restless. You can usually see the worms if you look carefully. It is harder to find the eggs but can be done with your doctor's help.

## How do you treat pinworms?

Everyone in the home must be treated whether they show signs of infection or not. Several medicines are available; your doctor can recommend the right treatment. Each medicine is given in a single dose and repeated in two weeks. If anyone in the home is exposed to the pinworms again, your child might

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have to take more treatments. Side effects are rare. Three anal tests (talk to your doctor about this) taken a week apart are done before you can be sure the worms are gone.

Pregnant or breastfeeding women should not take the medicine. Also, your doctor may choose not to treat children who are younger than two years old.

#### How do you control pinworms?

Wash your hands often, especially after going to the toilet, changing diapers, or before eating. Trim fingernails short and discourage nail biting and scratching bare anal areas. Bathe in the morning to get rid of any eggs laid overnight. Change underwear each day. Machine-wash and dry clothes and bedding using a hot setting to kill any eggs. Clean the house, especially bathrooms and toilet seats with hot, soapy water. Avoid shaking out the bedding. The eggs are sensitive to light, so leave blinds or curtains open in bedrooms during the daytime. Do not feel bad if you are carefully cleaning and you still can't get rid of the infection. Sometimes, pinworms are very hard to get rid of. Pinworm infection in the home does not mean you are a dirty family.

Children can go back to day care after the first dose of medicine and after they have bathed and trimmed and scrubbed their nails.

