

SOIL TRANSMITTED HELMINTHS

FACTSHEET

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Soil-transmitted helminths (STHs) sometimes referred to as **Intestinal Worms**, is a parasitic disease that is caused by several types of worms found in the soil. STHs are among the most common infections worldwide and affects mainly individuals in rural communities and school-aged children. This infection is also common in warm climate regions where environmental sanitation is poor and water supplies are unsafe. The main species that infect people are the roundworm (*Ascaris lumbricoides*), the whipworm (*Trichuris trichiura*) and hookworms (*Necator americanus* and *Ancylostoma duodenale*).

MODE OF TRANSMISSION

Soil-transmitted helminths are transmitted by nematode eggs that are passed in the faeces of infected persons. Adult worms live in the intestine where they produce thousands of eggs each day. Infections are more prevalent in areas that lack adequate sanitation, and can happen through the following ways:

- Consuming contaminated fruits and vegetables without proper washing
- Drinking contaminated water
- Touching contaminated soil & not properly washing hands afterwards
- Using contaminated hands to consume fruits and foods Walking barefoot on contaminated soil with mature larvae.

EFFECTS

Some of the effects of the disease are:

- Impairment of nutritional status of the infected individual resulting in anaemia and malnutrition.
- Impaired growth and physical development in children.
- Intestinal blockage and blood loss.

SOIL-TRANSMITTED HELMINTHS IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is reportedly the country with the highest burden of soil-transmitted helminths in Africa with over 108 million people (including over 28 million school age children) at risk of the infection.

SYMPTOMS

People with light infection do not usually exhibit symptoms. However, depending on how heavy the infection is (characterized by increased number of worms in the intestines), an infected person can experience the following symptoms:

- Diarrhoea and abdominal pain
- General malaise and weakness.
- Loss of appetite
- Protein loss

KEY FACTS

- Soil-Transmitted Helminth infections are caused by different species of parasitic worms.
- They are transmitted by eggs present in human faeces, that contaminate the soil in areas where sanitation is poor.
- Approximately 1.5 billion people are infected with soil-transmitted helminths worldwide.
- Infected children are nutritionally and physically impaired.
- Control is based on periodical deworming to eliminate infecting worms, health education to prevent reinfection, and improved sanitation to reduce soil contamination with infective eggs.
- Safe and effective medicines are available to control infection

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Practice good food hygiene.
- Practice adequate personal hygiene and sanitation measures.
- Treatment as Prevention: Periodic medicinal treatment (deworming) for at risk populations.
- On a national scale, promotion of interventions that eliminate open defecation and improve Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) services.

COUNTRY EFFORTS

The Schistosomiasis and Soil-Transmitted Helminths programme was created in 2007 with the goal to reduce national morbidity to the barest minimum in order to meet the global target of regular administration of deworming tablets to at least 75% in school-age children and other at-risk population. The programme has made the following achievements:

- Placed over 29 million people (including children 5 years to 14 years) on treatment for soil-transmitted helminths.
- Conducted baseline mapping in 773 LGAs from 2008 to 2017, with 429 classified as being endemic.
- Currently conducting control activities for soil-transmitted helminths in 421 LGAs of the 429 endemic LGAs.
- Conducted 5 effective rounds of treatment achieving at least 75% therapeutic coverage in 32 LGAs as of 2018.
- Drafted a guideline for controlled activities on soil-transmitted helminths in Nigeria.

TREATMENT

WHO recommends periodic medical treatment (deworming) for all people at risk of being infected (with or without having a prior diagnosis) with Albendazole (400mg) and Mebendazole (500mg).

Medications should be prescribed by a health care provider.



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CALL TO ACTION

- Practice personal hygiene.
- Thoroughly wash foods and fruits from the farm/market before consumption.
- Educate your peers and neighbours on the severity of intestinal worm infection.
- Use personal protective equipment when working with contaminated soil or waste.
- Dispose faeces and waste properly. Stop open defecation.

SOURCES

- <https://ncdc.gov.ng/diseases/info/s>
- <https://who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/soil-transmitted-helminth-infections>
- https://www.who.int/intestinal_worms/disease/en/

For more information, email us at info@activevoicesng.org or contact the National Coordinator, Neglected Tropical Disease (NTDs) Elimination Programme, Department of Public Health, Federal Ministry of Health, Abuja or call +234 803 451 4547

