



Filariasis

(Lymphatic)

What is filariasis?

Filariasis is a disease in which long, thread-like, parasitic worms infect a person's lymphatic system. This disease can cause pain, disfigurement and long-term or permanent disability. Filariasis occurs throughout tropical and sub-tropical parts of the world, including Africa, Southeast Asia, Dominican Republic, South Pacific Islands and the northern coast of South America.

What are the signs and symptoms of filariasis?

- Early infections that are confined to one or a few sites on the body may cause itching, rash and swelling in the area
- A more acute infection will produce fever, swollen and tender lymph nodes, and inflammation and swelling of the lymphatic vessels
- With prolonged exposure, a person may develop lymphedema (extreme swelling, usually in the extremities) and elephantiasis (hardening and thickening of the skin in the affected area).
- Some people develop a chronic asthma-like condition with shortness of breath and wheezing at night

How is filariasis spread?

Filariasis is spread through infected mosquitoes. A mosquito becomes infected with this parasite when it bites an infected human. When this mosquito bites someone else, the larvae are transmitted to the new person and a new infection is started. These larvae mature into adult worms after nine months and live in the lymph nodes of the groin or armpit. Within six to twelve months, the adult worms mate and release millions of microscopic worms into the bloodstream.

How is filariasis prevented?

There is no vaccine available to prevent this disease. The best prevention is to avoid exposure to mosquitoes by wearing long sleeves and pants, using mosquito repellents and sleeping under permethrin-treated bed nets.

How is filariasis treated?

- See your physician for treatment as soon as symptoms develop. There is medication available to kill the microscopic worms and to control mosquitoes
- Wash the swollen area daily with soap and water
- Use anti-bacterial cream on any wounds to prevent bacterial infection
- Exercise and elevate the affected limb to help decrease the fluid

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca