

Hydatid Disease

Background Information

Hydatid disease is caused by the canine tapeworm (*Echinococcus*). It can be transmitted to humans via infected dog faeces.

Organism

Echinococcus species – only *Echinococcus granulosus* is found in the UK

Incidence and Transmission

There are around 10 cases of hydatid disease in England and Wales each year. Incidence of the disease in the UK is increasing and is particularly prevalent in Mid Wales, Herefordshire and the Western Isles of Scotland.

The disease is carried by dogs and foxes, with the tapeworm tending to live in an animal for about one year. Infected dogs and foxes excrete tapeworm eggs in their faeces and if ingested this can cause infection in sheep or humans. Once ingested, the eggs hatch into larvae, which can form cysts. Cysts are most commonly found in the liver, but may form in other organs in the body including the lungs, heart, brain and bone.

Hydatid disease is not spread from person to person.

Occupations and processes where hydatid disease may present a risk

Occupational exposure to *Echinococcus granulosum* may occur in those who:

- are in contact with infected dogs; or
- are in contact with faeces from infected dogs.

Occupations where there may be a risk of occupationally acquired hydatid disease include:

- sheep farmers – from contact with sheep dogs;
- dog breeders and dog handlers;
- street cleaners and waste disposal workers; and
- veterinary surgeons.

Clinical Information

Cysts may take several years to produce clinical symptoms and those symptoms depend on the location of the cyst. For cysts in the liver, symptoms can include abdominal pain and jaundice. Sometimes the cysts will rupture, which can cause a range of symptoms including fever, skin rash and allergic reaction and which may be

fatal. A consequence of rupture of a cyst is that this causes the tapeworm to spread round the body and form cysts in other organs.

Anyone with these symptoms who has been in close contact with dogs or their faeces should seek medical attention.

The main treatment is surgical removal of the cyst, followed by drug treatment.

Control

The following control measures reduce the risk of infection:

- Do not feed dogs uncooked offal or other meat.
- Dogs should receive worm treatment every six weeks.
- Do not allow dogs to roam where there may be sheep carcasses.
- Sheep carcasses should be disposed of promptly.
- Good occupational hygiene practices should be followed, especially washing with warm water and soap after contact with dogs.
- Suitable protective clothing should be worn when handling dog faeces, especially gloves.
- A suitable disinfectant should be used.

Further Information

[Public Health England – Hydatid disease](#)

[Welsh Government – Hydatid disease information](#)