

Echinococcus multilocularis



WILDLIFE HEALTH PROGRAM

What is *E. multilocularis*?

E. multilocularis is a parasitic tapeworm that primarily infects foxes, coyotes, domestic dogs, and other canids. It is zoonotic, meaning it can also infect humans and other unintended hosts, leading to serious illness and even death.

How is *E. multilocularis* spread?

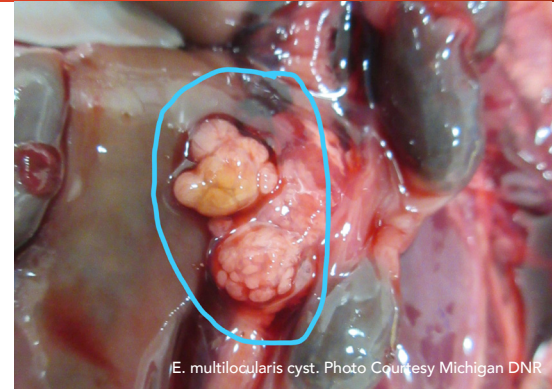
E. multilocularis spreads primarily through the ingestion of parasite eggs. Adult tapeworms reside in the small intestine of definitive hosts like foxes, coyotes, and domestic dogs, where they reproduce eggs that are passed in the host's feces. Intermediate hosts (typically small mammals such as rodents), become infected by ingesting these eggs from the environment. Inside the intermediate host's intestine, the eggs hatch, releasing larvae that travel through the bloodstream to organs, such as the liver, forming cysts over months to years.

What are the symptoms of *E. multilocularis*?

Infected wild canids and domestic dogs usually don't show any signs of illness and rarely form cysts inside their bodies, unlike rodents and other animals when infected. The cysts from *E. multilocularis* larvae grow slowly, so infected animals may not show any symptoms for a long time, even years. However, if symptoms do appear, they can include stomach pain, weight loss, weakness, and signs of liver problems.

Does *E. multilocularis* pose a risk to people?

Humans can become infected by accidentally ingesting *E. multilocularis* eggs found in contaminated food, water, or on the fur of infected animals. However, humans do not contribute to the tapeworm's lifecycle. In people, *E. multilocularis* can cause a serious disease called alveolar echinococcosis, where cysts primarily form in the liver and sometimes other organs. Without treatment, the disease can be life-threatening.



E. multilocularis cyst. Photo Courtesy Michigan DNR

Prevent

E. multilocularis

- Wash hands after handling pets, their food, or their waste
- Schedule regular veterinary check-ups for pets
- Regularly deworm pets
- Prevent pets from scavenging on wildlife carcasses or hunting rodents
- Properly dispose of pet waste
- Keep pets away from wildlife

IMPORTANT: *E. multilocularis* is a zoonotic tapeworm that can cause serious illness and even death, in humans.

REPORT SICK OR DEAD WILDLIFE

Scan QR code • Email : info.center@ky.gov • Call: 1-800-858-1549

