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GLOBAL UPDATE

Parasites: 'Tropical' Diseases Are Common in Arctic Dwellers, a Survey Finds



Kevin Frayer/CP Photo

By DONALD G. McNEIL Jr.
Published January 25, 2010

The kind of worm and protozoan infections that are often called neglected "tropical" diseases are also common among aboriginal peoples living in the Arctic, according to a recent survey.

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Outbreaks of trichinosis, a larval-worm disease commonly associated with eating undercooked pork and carnivorous wild game, also occur

among people who eat infected polar bear and walrus meat, and the Arctic harbors a unique species of the worm that can survive subzero temperatures. Mild infestations cause nausea and stomach pain; severe ones can kill.

In Alaska, there are sporadic human cases of a fish tapeworm known as diphyllobothriasis. Echinococcosis, a tapeworm disease that fills human lungs or livers with cysts that can crush blood vessels or kill if they rupture, needs both canines and hoofed animals in its life cycle. In New Zealand, it once thrived in sheep and working dogs; in the Arctic, it cycles between reindeer and elk and both wolves and domesticated dogs. It is declining in Alaska and Canada, where snowmobiles are replacing sled dogs, but is still common in Siberia and northern Russia.

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