
Myiasis Cutaneous

Frequently Asked Questions

What is myiasis?

Myiasis is the parasitic infestation of the body by the larvae (maggots) of fly species. Human myiasis is caused in sub-Saharan Africa by the Tumbu fly (*Cordylobia anthropophaga*) also known as mango fly or Putzi fly. The fly lays its eggs on the ground or on bedding or clothing that is laid on the ground to dry and once hatched the larva seek the warm skin of humans which they penetrate rapidly.

Who can get myiasis?

Myiasis is endemic in tropical and sub-tropical areas including Africa. People (adults and children) living in rural region or in areas of high fly density and in close contact with domestic animals (dogs) are at high risk of getting infected.

How is myiasis transmitted?

The female flies lay eggs in soil that is contaminated with faeces or urine or on damp clothes or bed linen that is laid on the ground to dry. The larvae hatch in 2-3 days and attach to unbroken skin and penetrate the skin causing swelling. There is no human to human transmission of the infection.

What are the signs and symptoms of myiasis?

The skin lesion starts as a papule (small swelling) that swells over a few days to something resembling a boil. In the centre a hole develops through which the larva protrudes its posterior tip through which it breaths.

How is cutaneous myiasis confirmed?

Observing these boil-like lesions on the skin and the larvae that emerge is generally adequate for a clinical diagnosis. Laboratory confirmation is by observing the fly, larva or eggs under the microscope. Samples that are collected, i.e. the fly, larvae or eggs, should be transported in 70% alcohol (formalin should not be used) and transported to the nearest lab.

How is it treated?

To treat apply Vaseline to the lesion to cover the tip of the larvae so as to obstruct the air flow. This will cause the larva to come to the skin surface where it can be easily removed. After the removal of the larva, the wound must be cleansed. Antibiotics may need to be administered in cases where there is secondary bacterial infection. Surgical removal is not needed.

How can I prevent the disease?

- By not drying clothes/bedding on the ground
- Ironing clothes before using them
- Wearing shoes to cover your feet
- General improvement of sanitation and personal hygiene
- Control of domestic animal larvae infestation

Where can I find out more information?

For emergency advice, contact the NICD hotline: 082 883 9920.