

Parasitic Cysticercosis (Taenia krabbei)



Figure 1. Image of cysticercosis in muscle tissue of ungulate.

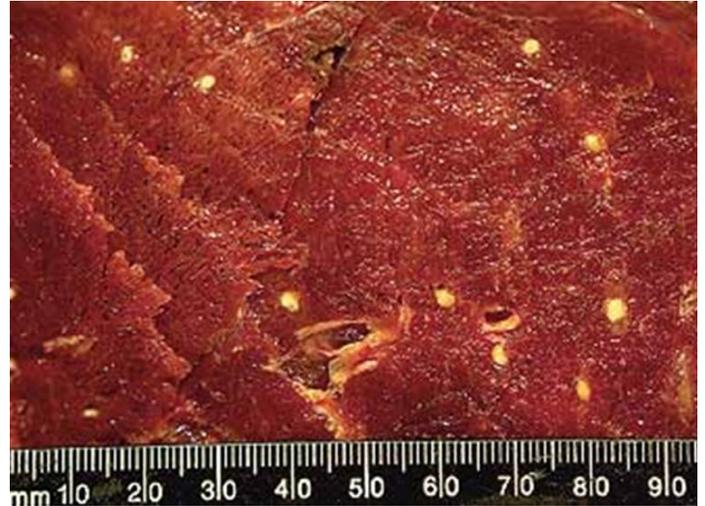


Figure 2. Image of cysticercosis in muscle tissue of ungulate. Photo courtesy of Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

What is cysticercosis?

Sometimes called ‘moose measles’, cysticercosis is the ‘disease’ caused by the cystic (larval) form of the parasitic tapeworm, genus *Taenia*. Taeniid tapeworms require two hosts to complete their life cycle. Ungulates (deer, domestic cattle, sheep, elk, and moose) are intermediate hosts for the larval/juvenile tapeworms, which form cysts in the ungulate muscle and connective tissue. The cysts formed by the tapeworm larvae are small (2-4 mm), round to oval in shape, and yellow/white in colour. Adult taeniid tapeworms live and grow in the intestines of infected carnivores (usually wolves, but coyotes, dogs, foxes, mountain lions, and black bears are also possible), which are also known as definitive hosts. Definitive hosts are exposed to larval tapeworms when ingesting infected ungulates. Adult tapeworms produce eggs which are expelled from carnivores in feces. Intermediate hosts ingest the eggs while grazing, where the eggs hatch and develop into larvae on the ground or vegetation.

Where is *Taenia krabbei* found? Is it found in Oregon?

Taeniids, the species of tapeworms that form larval cysts in ungulates, are found across North America. They are one of the most common parasites seen by hunters.

Can humans become infected with *Taenia krabbei*?

No, humans cannot become infected with *Taenia krabbei*. Although the cysts can be aesthetically displeasing, humans are unable to be infected with either the adult (worm) or cystic (larval) form of *Taenia krabbei*. Further, the larvae found in meat are killed by cooking or freezing. However, dogs could be suitable hosts for adult taeniid tapeworms if fed uncooked meat containing larval cysts. We recommend feeding dogs only cooked meat, and regular deworming as advised by your veterinarian.

What is the significance of cysticercosis to wildlife?

Taeniid tapeworms are considered to be a natural part of healthy ecosystems. They have evolved extensively with both their definitive (carnivore) and intermediate (ungulate) hosts for thousands of years. In their normal, otherwise healthy hosts, these tapeworms are usually found at low enough volumes to not be considered pathogenic, and tapeworm cysts are usually found incidentally by hunters.

For more information, please contact:

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Health and Population Laboratory WildlifeHealth@state.or.us or 866-968-2600.