

Tapeworm-carried disease can be prevented

by Dr. Ted Mala

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"You better write a article about something going around different villages up North. . . people are afraid to eat caribou meat ever since they took that boy from Ambler to the hospital in Anchorage when his lung collapsed."

Hilda Wood's usually smiling face was filled with concern and worry. With a quick visit to the ANS Hospital in Anchorage and a conversation with one of the country's best chest surgeons and world experts on a medical problem called "Cystic Hydatid Disease" (pronounced sis-tick high-dat-id), I quickly found the answers people were looking for.

A very kind and gentle man, even somewhat shy, Dr. Joe Wilson quietly works all hours with patients often running

between his fourth floor surgery office (he is the ANS Chief of Surgery) and the operating rooms of the hospital.

I told him that people were concerned that they might catch something from eating caribou meat that would make them sick and even collapse their lungs. He then showed me some of the studies that he has been doing on the subject for years.

We looked at the case of a 12-year-old boy who became very sick with a high fever and seemed to be coughing up a lot of water. The doctors knew that this was not an ordinary case of pneumonia and that the boy's problems began during a hunting trip years ago.

It was at that time that they killed a moose or caribou and fed the lungs of the

dead animal to their dogs. Later on, the dog passed the worm infection it got from the lungs it had eaten to the boy where they grew in his lungs in a little sack or "cyst".

This sack contained fluid which drained into his lungs which made them collapse. He also was able to cough up a lot of this liquid. They were able to treat him at the hospital without having to do major surgery.

Out of the 330 known Alaskan and Canadian cases up to 1971, 100 of them had to be operated on. Depending on the case, some require surgery and others don't.

Cystic Hydatid Disease is caused by a small tapeworm that is found in Alaska in dogs and wolves. Scientifically this tapeworm is called "Echinococcus granulosus" and is very tiny. . . only a quarter of an

inch long:

Look at the drawing and follow the arrows. Moose and caribou swallow these tapeworm eggs when they eat plants or drink water that has been contaminated by wolf or dog feces.

Once the egg is in them, it changes its form and turns into its cystic form. Like a butterfly and a caterpillar, the tapeworm goes from its egg form to its cystic form and like to live in moose and caribou lungs.

There their little heads (called "scolices") attach themselves until some dog or wolf comes along and eats them up along with the lungs. In the dog or wolf they grow into full adult worms and start laying eggs which go out in the animal's feces. The man gets them from being around his dogs and it spreads to his family.

How can you prevent this

from happening after you kill you next moose or caribou: Easily if you follow these steps:

1. Get rid of the lungs (and unused livers) of all moose, reindeer and caribou so that dogs cannot eat them
2. Do not feed the liver to dogs without first cooking it well.
3. If you notice these cysts

(or sacks) in the lungs of your moose or caribou, the rest of the animal IS SAFE to eat.

In other words, humans cannot get the tapeworm from eating animal flesh. Humans do not get it from moose or caribou. **THEY GET IT FROM INFECTED DOGS.**

If you are not sure about all of this, ask your local hospital service unit or get in touch with Dr. Wilson at the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage.