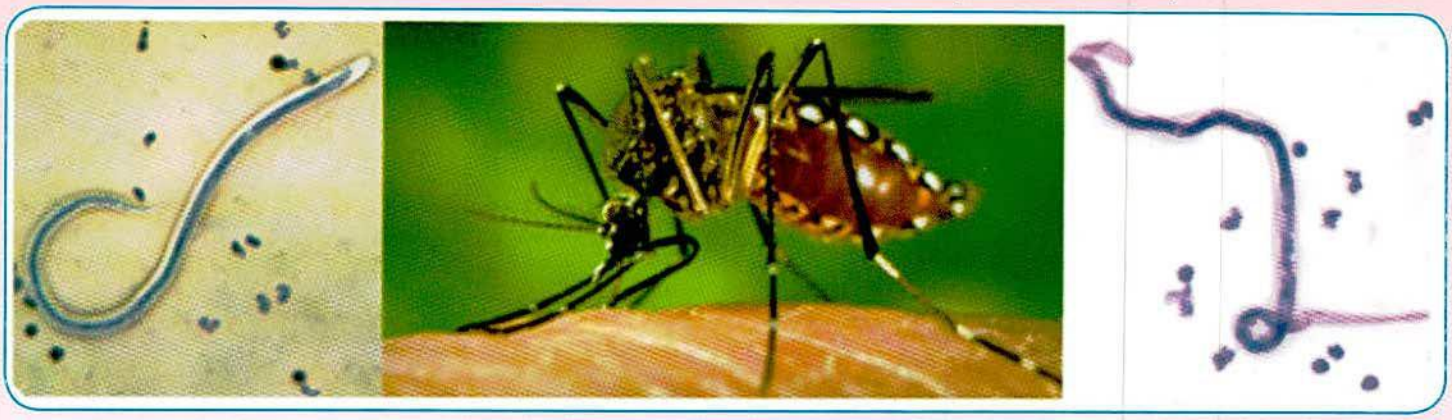
Elephantiasis (Lymphatic Filariasis)

What is Lymphatic filariasis?

- It is a parasitic disease caused by microscopic, thread-like worms (Wuchereria.bancrofti).
- It affects animals and humans.
- Elephantiasis affects over 120 million people in 73 countries in the tropics and sub-tropics.



How is Lymphatic filariasis spread?

- Spreads by mosquito bites.
- The microscopic worms pass from the mosquito through the skin, and travel to the lymph vessels.
- In the lymph vessels they grow into adults.
- An adult worm lives for about 5–7 years.
- Adult worms multiply into millions of worms in the blood.

What are the clinical signs?

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) clinical signs in humans include:

- Cases may be without clinical symptoms.
- A few will accumulate fluids and swelling in limbs, breasts and male private parts.
- Hardening and thickening of the skin (Elephantiasis) following secondary bacterial infection due to weak immunity.
- Males can develop hydrocele or swelling of the scrotum.
- Tropical pulmonary eosinophilia syndrome manifesting as cough, shortness of breath, and wheezing.

How is Elephantiasis diagnosed?

- The standard method for diagnosing active infection is the identification of microfilariae by microscopic examination. This is not always feasible because in most parts of the world, the tinny worms (microfilariae) only circulate in the blood at night. For this reason, the blood collection has to be done at night to coincide with the appearance of the microfilariae.
- Blood examination (Serologic) techniques. Because swelling of lymphnodes may develop many years after infection; laboratory tests are often negative with these patients.

How can I prevent infection?

- Sleep under a mosquito net.
- Wear long sleeved shirts and blouses and trousers.
- Use mosquito repellent on exposed skin between dusk and dawn.
- Use chemical sprays

What is the treatment for lymphatic filariasis?

- For human treatment, visit a health facility.
- For animal treatment, visit a veterinary staff.

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