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## Introduction

Tapeworms are also known as cestodes and they are more often found in backyard or free range poultry than in intensively reared birds, where they are now considered to be a rarity. Tapeworms are more common in the warmer seasons when their intermediate hosts are more abundant.

The two large tapeworms of poultry (chicken) – *Railletina cesticillus* and *Choanotaenia infundibulum* – have beetles and houseflies as their intermediate hosts. Some infections by these large tapeworms appear to block the bird's intestines. Mortality and/or long term effects from tapeworm infections are rare. Small tapeworms also occur.

Turkeys and ducks have their own species of tapeworm.

## Main species of chicken tapeworms

Tapeworm	Intermediate host
<i>Amoebotaenia cuneata</i>	Earthworm
<i>Choanotaenia infundibulum</i>	House fly, beetle
<i>Davainea proglottina</i>	Slug, snail
<i>Hymenolepis carioca</i>	Stable fly, dung beetle
<i>H. cantaniana</i>	Beetle
<i>Railletina cesticillus</i>	Beetle
<i>R. tetragona</i>	Ant
<i>R. echinobothrida</i>	Ant

## Lifecycle

A segment of the tapeworm is known as a proglottid. One or more gravid proglottids are shed from the tapeworm daily. Each proglottid may contain several hundred eggs which it releases. Intermediate hosts then become infected by consuming individual eggs from the bird's faeces.

These eggs, which are hooked, then attach to and penetrate the intermediate host's gut and become cysticercoids. These remain in the intermediate host's body cavity until eaten by a bird. In the bird's digestive tract the cysticercoid is activated by bile and begins to form a new tapeworm.

This tapeworm then produces its first mature proglottids in 2-3 weeks and the cycle is repeated.

## Treatment

In many countries there are no licensed products for treating tapeworms so, when it comes to chicken tapeworms, control centres around eliminating or reducing populations of the intermediate host(s). Historically, this was done very effectively by taking flocks indoors. The current trend of moving back to outdoor production will surely be welcomed by tapeworms!