Chapter 13: Pork Tapeworm in an Orthodox Jewish Community: Arriving at a Biologically Plausible Hypothesis

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Dr. Schantz is a public health veterinarian who is familiar with zoonotic diseases. In 1990 Dr. Schantz was called by physicians in New York City about cases of pork tapeworm infection in some of their patients. As he began his investigation, he noticed that all of the cases were Orthodox Jews. This is puzzling as the Jewish tradition does not permit the consumption of pork, a rule which the cases religiously obey and the tapeworm is specifically a pork tapeworm. Therefore, Dr. Schantz has to establish a “biologically plausible hypothesis to explain” an outbreak in a group that has low risk factors for exposure.

Questions:

1. If this was your investigation what other hypotheses could you have come up with to explain this outbreak? How would you conduct the investigation?
2. Why is knowing the life cycle of a tapeworm helpful in determining how the infection affects an infected host?
3. How can we eradicate tapeworm infections using information from the chapter? How can we use it to reduce chances for transmission?
4. What other parasites are you familiar with?