Reply to “To Differentiate *Taenia* Eggs”

We appreciate the interest in this photo quiz, which showed a *Taenia* egg with an intact primary membrane (4). It would be useful to distinguish between eggs of *Taenia solium* and *Taenia saginata*, because *T. solium* can cause both cysticercosis and gastrointestinal infection in humans, while *T. saginata* causes only gastrointestinal infection in humans (1, 3). Treatment should be initiated when any *Taenia* eggs are detected, regardless of species, but because cysticercosis can occur following oral autoinoculation of eggs from the same individual's stool or after ingestion of eggs from the stool of a close contact, identification of *T. solium* infection should stimulate consideration of cysticercosis in the index patient and household contacts (3). Molecular tests that distinguish between *T. solium* and *T. saginata* are described in the literature but are not widely available (1).

We were interested to learn of the potential utility of the Ziehl-Neelsen acid-fast stain for identification of *Taenia* species. Jimenez et al. published a study in which they assessed the utility of the Ziehl-Neelsen stain for distinguishing between *T. saginata* and *T. solium* in a combination of fresh and fixed specimens (2). They found that the embryophore (outer covering) of *T. saginata* stained entirely magenta in 7/13 cases and a mix of magenta and blue in 6/13 cases. The embryophore of *T. solium* stained entirely magenta in 1/18 cases, a mix of magenta and blue in 13/18 cases, and entirely blue in 4/18 cases. While a greater proportion of *T. saginata* eggs than *T. solium* eggs stained entirely magenta, the overall accuracy of the test results was so low that this test is unlikely to be used by most clinical laboratories for differentiation of *Taenia* species.

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