



# Ringworm Fact Sheet

## **What are ringworm?**

Ringworm is a type of fungus that causes common skin, hair and nail infections. Infections caused by this fungus are also known by the names "tinea" and "ringworm." It is important to emphasize that "ringworm" is not caused by a worm, but rather by a type of fungus called "ringworm." One example of a very common ringworm infection is athlete's foot, which is also called tinea pedis. Another common ringworm infection affecting the groin area is jock itch, also known as tinea cruris.

Trichophyton rubrum and Trichophyton tonsurans are two common ringworms. These two species are usually transmitted from person to person. Another common ringworm is Microsporum canis, which is transmitted from animals such as cats and dogs to people. Ringworm lives on moist areas of the skin, such as places where there are skin folds. They can also contaminate items in the environment, such as clothing, towels and bedding.

## **Who gets ringworm infections?**

Ringworm infections are very common. They can affect anyone, including people who are otherwise healthy. Ringworm infections may be more common among people with suppressed immune systems, people who use communal baths, and people who are involved in contact sports such as wrestling. Outbreaks of infections can occur in schools, households and institutional settings.

The ringworm infection that affects the scalp and hair is known as tinea capitis. It is especially common among school-aged children. For reasons that are not well understood, tinea capitis does not usually occur after puberty. Other kinds of ringworm infections tend to be more common in adolescents and adults.

## **How are ringworm infections spread?**

Spread usually occurs through direct contact with an infected person or animal. Clothing, bedding and towels can also become contaminated and spread the infection.

## **What are the symptoms of a ringworm infection?**

Ringworm infections can affect the skin on almost any area of the body, such as the scalp, legs, arms, feet, groin and nails. These infections are usually itchy. Redness, scaling, or fissuring of the skin, or a ring with irregular borders and a cleared central area may occur. If the infection involves the scalp, an area of hair loss may result. More aggressive infections may lead to an abscess or cellulitis. Areas infected by ringworm may become secondarily infected by bacteria.

## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms typically appear between 4 and 14 days following exposure.

## **If I have symptoms, should I see my doctor?**

Yes. Treatment is typically available and successful for ringworm infections.

## **How is a ringworm infection diagnosed?**

Your doctor may make a presumptive diagnosis based on your symptoms and physical examination. To confirm the diagnosis your doctor may obtain scrapings of affected skin or clippings of affected nails. These may be examined under a microscope and may be sent to the laboratory for a fungal culture. Keep in mind that the results of the fungal culture may not be available for 2-4 weeks.

*For further information, contact the Oklahoma City-County Health Department  
(405) 425-4437*



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## **How can ringworm infections be treated?**

The particular medication and duration of treatment is based on the location of the infection. Scalp infections usually require treatment with an oral antifungal medication. Infections of other areas of skin are usually treated with topical antifungal medications. Nail infections can be challenging to treat, and may be treated with oral and/or topical antifungal medications.

## **How can ringworm infections be prevented?**

Good hygiene, such as regular handwashing, is important. People should avoid sharing hairbrushes, hats and other articles of clothing that may come into contact with infected areas. Pets with signs of skin disease should be evaluated by a veterinarian. Beauty salons and barbershops should disinfect instruments with approved disinfectants after each use. Contact your local and/or state health department for specific guidelines and regulations in your area.

## **There is a ringworm outbreak in my child's school/daycare center. What should I do?**

You should contact your local health department. Your local health department may have information about how long children with ringworm should remain out of school/daycare. Tell your child not to share personal items, such as clothing, hairbrushes and hats, with other people. Encourage frequent handwashing. Take your child to the pediatrician if she/he develops symptoms.

## **My pet has ringworm and I am worried about ringworm in my house. What should I do?**

Make sure your pets have been evaluated by a veterinarian. If you develop symptoms, be sure to seek medical attention.

There are no federal guidelines about ringworm and environmental disinfection. Transmission of the infection may occur via direct contact with an infected person or animal or from contact with contaminated environmental surfaces. A reasonable approach is to perform regular cleaning to help remove spores from the environment. Make sure to use cleaning products according to the manufacturer's labeling, and never mix cleaning products, as harmful fumes may result. For surfaces that are safe to bleach, a quarter-cup of bleach in a gallon of water can be used for disinfection. For fabric surfaces or soft items that are washable, a hot water wash and hot air drying may help to remove and kill spores.

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