



Ringworm

- Ringworm is an infection that is caused by a fungus. It is very contagious and can affect the scalp, face, body, feet or nails. Ringworm affects both humans and animals.

Ringworm gets its name from the raised pattern the infection forms on the skin. It looks like a circle.

Signs and symptoms

Ringworm on the body begins as a ring-shaped, flat rash. Gradually the ring becomes larger and spreads, with the inside of the ring clearing. The outside of the ring can be either dry and scaly or wet and crusted.

The signs include:

- **On the scalp**, ringworm starts as a small pimple that grows larger and creates patches of dry, bald skin. The hair can become brittle and break off and sometimes yellowish, crusty areas develop. This form of ringworm is most common in children. Scalp ringworm usually appears 10 to 14 days after contact with an infected person, pet or surface.
- **On the fingernails** - if the nail bed becomes infected, it can become thick, brittle and discoloured.
- **On the feet**, ringworm causes dry, cracked skin, most often between the toes. (Also called Athlete's foot or tinea).
- **On the skin** (including the groin, genitals, inner thighs and buttocks), ringworm causes a red, itchy rash in the moist skin folds. As the rash gradually expands, its centre clears to produce a ring. Skin ringworm usually appears 4 to 10 days after contact with an infected person, pet or surface.

The skin is the most common place to find ringworm.

How it is spread

Ringworm is spread by contact with humans, animals and contaminated objects. Humans are most likely to get infected from contact with other people who already have ringworm, school playgrounds, gyms, contaminated clothing, bath mats, towels, damp floors and showers.

Ringworm is very contagious and it is important to avoid direct contact with the infected person or pet and not share personal items.

Treatment

Ringworm is difficult to prevent because it is very common and contagious even before the symptoms appear.

Ringworm can be treated effectively with most anti-fungal medications. Early treatment is important and your doctor or pharmacist will be able to advise you.

It is important to:

- Avoid contact with infected people. Where this is not possible, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water and dry them well
- Pay special attention to drying moist areas on the body
- Don't share brushes, combs, hats, clothing or linen with an infected child
- Do not walk in bare feet on damp floors or in communal showers
- Avoid contact with infected pets and wash your pets with anti-fungal solution
- Don't let an infected child use communal pools or baths until you have started the appropriate treatment
- Wash clothing and linen (e.g. sheets and pillowcases) often and with hot water
- If you have ringworm on the feet spray all shoes with antifungal spray (eg. Dr. Scholl) to help stop your feet being re-infected after treatment

Key points to remember

- Ringworm is a fungal infection that is highly contagious and affects the scalp, the body, the feet or nails
- Ringworm is spread by contact with someone who has ringworm, or by touching an object which may contain the fungus (eg. brushes, showers or towels)
- Good hygiene is important - wash hands well with soap and water and dry them thoroughly

Further information

- Your local doctor
- Wheatbelt Public Health Unit: phone 9622 4328