

Ringworm (Tinea)



What Is It?

Ringworm (or tinea) is a mild and common fungal infection of the skin, scalp, feet or nails.

What Are the Symptoms?

On the skin, ringworm appears as a flat, growing, ring-shaped rash. The edges of the circle are usually reddish and may be raised, scaly and itchy. Another type of ringworm fungus can cause the skin to become lighter in flat patches, especially on the trunk and face. On the scalp, infection begins as a small bump and spreads outward, leaving scaly patches of temporary hair loss. On the feet, the skin between the toes scales and cracks, and blisters may be seen. On the nails, a chronic infection can cause thickening, discoloration and fragility.

Who Gets It and How?

Ringworm is spread by direct contact with a person or animal infected with the fungus. It can also be spread indirectly through contact with articles (such as combs or clothing), or with surfaces which have been contaminated with the fungus. A child with ringworm is infectious as long as the fungus remains present in the skin lesion. The fungus is no longer present when the lesion starts to shrink.

These infections can often be diagnosed by their typical appearance. Occasionally, scrapings of suspicious skin may be examined under the microscope or cultured to see if a ringworm fungus is present. An antifungal ointment is usually applied to the skin for several weeks. Occasionally, antifungal medicine is taken by mouth, particularly if the diagnosis is ringworm of the scalp.

When Should People with this Illness Be Excluded?

There is no need to exclude children/staff with these common, mild infections once treatment has been started. Refer persons with a suspicious rash to their health care providers for appropriate diagnosis and treatment and allow them to return as soon as treatment has begun.

Where Should I Report It?

Notify parents and staff if more than one person at the facility develops ringworm.

How Can I Limit the Spread of Ringworm?

- Keep lesions covered, if possible.
- Observe good hand washing technique among all children and adults.
- Keep the child care environment as clean, dry and cool as possible, since ringworm fungi grow easily on moist, warm surfaces.
- Keep feet clean and dry.
- Pets with skin rashes should be evaluated by a veterinarian. If the pet's rash is caused by fungus, children should not be allowed to come in contact with the pet until the rash has been treated and heals and the pet has been bathed.
- Don't share combs, brushes, towels or bedding.
- Dry skin thoroughly after washing.
- Clean and disinfect bathroom surfaces and toys daily.