

## Ringworm (Fungal Skin Infections) Page 1

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### **Ringworm (Dermatophytosis)**

Ringworm is a very old term used for a fungal infection on the skin; it has nothing to do with worms or rings! In people ringworm can form a red ring shape with lots of scaling and crusting. In animals it usually appears as crusting, scaling, hair loss with or without itch. The hair loss may appear as a circular shape but not always. Some lesions can be a fungal infection that can present differently, such as a raised red plaque or a swelling and discharging lesion.

In cats, Persians and their crosses seem to be over-represented and are the most difficult breed to cure and prevent relapses. Ringworm typically affects cats in a cattery or multi-cat households. Dogs rarely get dermatophytosis and more often than not dogs with circular hair loss, crusting, scaling and itch, will have a bacterial infection rather than a fungal infection.

### **How is ringworm diagnosed?**

Diagnosis may be made using a Wood's lamp, biopsy or hair examination (the infective spores are present on the hairs). A culture is required to determine the species (type of ringworm), and hence the origin of the fungus (animal, soil or human). Diagnosis is not possible by examination alone as other types of infection (especially bacterial infections in dogs) can produce typical 'ringworm' type lesions.

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### **How is ringworm treated?**

Some lesions in animals may self-cure but this takes several months and they will spread ringworm to the environment including other pets and humans. Medications, tablets and shampoos will shorten the duration of the infection with shampoos also reducing the spread of fungus throughout the household. Ringworm can be very slow to resolve in long haired cats and treatment may be needed for several months. Fungal cultures are used to determine when treatment can stop. Depending on what type of ringworm is trying to be prevented, strategies may be needed to prevent recurrence. Treatment in a multi-cat household can be especially challenging, as the numbers of infective spores on infected cats can produce the risk of re-infection of cats and humans. This is re-infection can be caused by the cats shed hairs which can remain viable for several months in the environment. A coordinated program of both treatment and prevention strategies for the pets and humans is needed. This must include a plan for control of the infected hairs in the environment to maximize the chance of success in these cases. Specialist veterinary dermatologists are up to date with the latest options for therapy and are specifically qualified to design the best strategies for the tough cases.

### **Is there a risk of transmission to humans?**

Certain species of dermatophytes (fungus that infect the skin) are transmissible to and from humans. Children, the elderly and the unwell are most at risk of catching ringworm from an infected pet. If you suspect that any family member has developed ringworm then you should see your doctor.