



Ringworm

What is ringworm?

Ringworm is a skin infection caused by a fungus that can affect the scalp, skin, groin, fingers, feet or nails. This infection is called by different names (e.g. athlete's foot or jock itch) depending on the part of the body affected.

Who gets ringworm?

Anyone can get ringworm. People who have weakened immune systems may be especially at risk for infection and may have problems fighting off the infection. People who use public showers or locker rooms, athletes (particularly those who are involved in contact sports such as wrestling), people who wear tight shoes and have excessive sweating, and people who have close contact with animals may also be more likely to come in contact with the fungi that cause ringworm. Children are more susceptible to some kinds of ringworm, while others occur equally in all age groups.



Ringworm on the arm

How do ringworm infections spread?

Ringworm spreads by direct skin-to-skin contact with infected people or pets. In addition, indirect contact with floors, shower stalls, hairbrushes, toys (such as stuffed animals) and other items used by infected people can also be a source for ringworm infection.

What are the symptoms of ringworm?

Ringworm on the skin usually appears as an itchy, red, raised, scaly patch that may blister and ooze. The patches are usually round and often have a sharp defined red edge with a center that is typically clear (it may look like a ring). If the scalp or beard is infected, a person may have bald patches or stubbles (hair that is brittle and breaks easily). Infected nails may become discolored and thick.

How soon do symptoms appear?

It is unknown how soon symptoms will appear after a person is exposed to ringworm. In most cases, ringworm is visible 4-10 days on the body and 10-14 days on the scalp after contact with an infected item or person. Infection of the toenails probably occurs weeks after being exposed.

What is the treatment for ringworm?

Initially, ringworm may get better or even go away if an infected person keeps their skin clean and dry, washes their bed sheets and nightclothes frequently, and uses over the counter antifungal lotions, powders, or creams. A continuing infection may need to be treated by a doctor who can prescribe medication in the form of a pill or powder that can get rid of the infection. These medicines usually have to be used for at least 4 weeks to be effective. In addition, pets (especially cats) may need to be treated.

How can ringworm be prevented?

Items such as clothing, hats, brushes and towels of an infected person should not be shared with others. Keep skin and feet clean and dry, and wear sandals or shoes at gyms, pools and lockers. Avoid touching pets with bald spots.