

Ringworm (Fungal Rash)

Ringworm is a skin infection caused by a fungus. Treatment is easy and usually works well.

What is ringworm?

Ringworm is a fungal skin infection. (It is not due to a worm as its name implies!) There are many types of fungus germs (fungi) and some can infect the skin, nails, and hair. Examples of fungal infections are ringworm on the body (tinea corporis), scalp ringworm (tinea capitis), and athlete's foot (tinea pedis). This leaflet just deals with ringworm of the body. (Other leaflets in this series deal with the other types of fungal skin and nail infections.)

How can you catch ringworm?

- Most cases occur for no apparent reason. Fungi are common and an infection can occur 'out of the blue'.
- From animals. Some dogs, cats, and other pets have fungal infections on their skin. They can pass on the infection, especially to children. (Animals can be treated too if you suspect a pet is the cause. See your vet.) Farm animals can also be a source. Touching a farm gate where infected animals pass through may be enough to infect your skin.
- From person to person via close touching, sharing towels, etc.

What does the ringworm rash look like?

A small area of infected skin tends to spread outwards. It typically develops into a circular, red, inflamed patch of skin. The outer edge is more inflamed and scaly than the paler center. So, it often looks like a ring that becomes gradually larger. Sometimes only one patch of infection occurs. Sometimes several patches occur over the body, particularly if you catch the infection from handling an infected animal.

The rash may be mildly irritating, but sometimes it is very itchy and inflamed. The rash may vary depending on which type of fungus causes the infection. Sometimes fungal skin infections look similar to other skin rashes such as psoriasis.

What is the treatment for ringworm?

You can buy an antifungal cream from pharmacies, or get one on prescription. Modern creams are very good at clearing a patch of ringworm. For the best chance of success:

- Apply the cream to the surrounding 4-6 cm of normal skin in addition to the rash.
- Apply for as long as advised. This varies between the different creams, so read the instructions carefully. Although the rash may seem to go quite quickly, you still need to apply the cream for 1-2 weeks after the rash has gone. This is to completely clear the fungi from the skin, which will prevent the rash from returning.

An antifungal medicine taken by mouth is sometimes prescribed if the infection is widespread or severe, and may be needed to clear fungal infections of the hands or feet. Children do not need to stay off school once treatment has started.