



Ringworm

What is ringworm?

Ringworm is not a worm infection. Ringworm is a contagious skin infection caused by different types of fungi. Ringworm occurs on the scalp, skin and nails. “Jock itch” is ringworm of the groin and “Athlete’s Foot” is ringworm of the feet.

How is it spread?

Ringworm can be passed from one person to another by skin to skin contact, by sharing contaminated towels or combs, by sharing clothing or sports equipment, by contact with shower or pool surfaces or by contact with an infected animal’s skin or hair. Fungi grow best in warm dark areas of the body.

What does ringworm look like?

In the hair, bald patches will appear on the scalp. The skin in this area will be scaly. Sometimes crusted sores develop. The patches may be covered with tiny hairs that are broken off at the roots.

On the body, ringworm may be found as a flat, round rash on the chest, stomach, arms, legs or back. It may itch or burn. The edges of the rash may be red and scaly with small blisterlike bumps. As the rash expands, the center area becomes clear, giving a ring appearance. Nails with ringworm may become thicker, discolored and brittle or may become white and fall off.

A health care provider can diagnose ringworm by an examination of the infected area.

How is it treated?

Ringworm is treated with fungus-killing creams applied directly to the affected area or by medicines taken by mouth. Talk with your health care provider about prescription or over-the-counter treatments.

How can ringworm be prevented?

Ringworm is hard to prevent. The fungus is very common and is contagious before symptoms begin to appear. However, it helps to dry off completely after a bath or shower, including your feet. Wear loose fitting cotton clothes and change socks and underwear daily. Do not share towels, clothes, sheets or personal care items with other people. Wash your clothes, towels and sheets in hot water with soap. Wear sandals or shoes at gyms, lockers or pools. Make sure your pet is checked for ringworm and treated if needed.

Children can return to school or child care 24 hours after treatment has started. The area with ringworm should be covered with clothing if possible, until it begins to shrink. Band-aids should not be used to cover ringworm in children less than age 3.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 641-7777 or visit www.guilfordhealth.org