

Ringworm Fact Sheet

Ringworm is a common fungal infection of the scalp, skin, or nails

It gets its name from its appearance on the skin, which is often an itchy, ring-shaped rash. Other names for ringworm include tinea, dermatophytosis, athlete's foot (ringworm of the feet), jock itch (ringworm of the groin), and onychomycosis (ringworm of the nails). It typically looks red on light skin and appears gray or brown on darker skin. Despite the name, ringworm is not caused by a worm.

Anyone can get ringworm, but people with weakened immune systems are more likely to become infected and may have difficulty fighting off a ringworm infection. Ringworm is also common among athletes who participate in contact sports.

Ringworm can be spread in many different ways, including by:

- Skin-to-skin contact with an infected person or animal
- Contact with the hair or dander of an infected person or animal
- Contact with contaminated objects like towels, clothing, bed sheets, hairbrushes, and sports equipment
- Contact with contaminated surfaces like floors or seats, or benches found in locker rooms and public bathrooms

Symptoms of ringworm include:

- Itching
- Redness
- Ring-shaped rash
- Red, scaly, cracked skin
- Hair loss

Symptoms may vary based on the area of the body affected, but they usually appear 4 to 14 days after exposure.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you think you have ringworm

A healthcare provider may diagnose ringworm based on appearance and symptoms, or they may order a test to confirm the diagnosis. Your healthcare provider may also prescribe antifungal medication in the form of a pill or topical cream to treat your ringworm infection.

Non-prescription medications and remedies may help manage ringworm infection

Some forms of ringworm can be treated with non-prescription (over-the-counter) antifungal medications. Do not use steroid creams for rashes that could be ringworm. Steroids (or corticosteroids) are in many over-the-counter creams for rashes. Steroid creams can make ringworm infections worse.

In addition to medication, keeping the affected area clean and dry can help promote healing and prevent the spread of infection.

There are several ways that you can prevent ringworm

There is no vaccine to prevent ringworm, but there are several simple things you can do to lower your risk of infection, such as:

- Keep your skin and fingernails clean and dry, especially in areas prone to sweating.
- Do not share personal items like sports gear, towels, socks, and hairbrushes.
- Wear protective footwear in areas like public bathrooms, showers, locker rooms, and pool areas.
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated.
- Avoid skin-to-skin contact, including intimate or sexual contact, with anyone with known or suspected ringworm.
- Avoid close contact with animals known to have ringworm. Wash your hands after touching pets.
- Have pets checked and treated for ringworm by a veterinarian, if necessary.