
Ringworm

Contrary to popular belief ringworm is actually caused by a group of fungi and not from a worm at all. It received its name in error because of the rings of irritated, itchy skin that made it look like a worm.



There are several different types of fungi that can cause ringworm and they are all grouped together and known as dermatophytes. The fungi feed on the dead skin cells and hair causing the classic round, red lesions with dry flakey skin around the edges in people. In animals, ringworm can look like a dry, grey, scaly patch that may or may not itch but can also mimic any other skin lesion and have any appearance.

The fungal spores are extremely hardy in the environment and can live there for several years. To come into contact with ringworm the skin of an animal needs to be exposed to the spores and the skin needs to be irritated such as an area that is shaved, scraped or scratched. The fungus cannot affect healthy intact skin. Once an animal is infected, they are constantly dropping spore covered hairs as the hair breaks off. Some animals can be carriers, meaning that they have the spores present on them but do not show signs however they can still infect other animals.

There are several different types of fungus that can cause ringworm and determining which type of fungus can determine what type of treatment would be best. There are a few different ways to determine if your pet has ringworm. One way is to use a Wood's Lamp which will cause the spores to fluoresce green. The drawback to this testing method is that you can have both false positives and false negatives meaning that things such as soap residues can show up as a false positive or the animal may have ringworm and it will not fluoresce. On rare occasions doing a biopsy may be necessary to determine the type of fungus. The most common and most accurate type of test is a fungal culture. The one drawback to this test is that it takes 10 days to have results. Your veterinarian will more than likely start your pet on oral medications to combat the ringworm infection. There are also topical treatment options as well but they can be harder to administer. It is also important to clean any areas that may be infested with spores and it is best to try and keep pets that have ringworm confined to one area to reduce the amount of cleaning that needs to be done.



Ringworm is contagious to people and other animals. There are some people that are at a greater risk of contracting ringworm such as people with reduced immune capacity. These people include young children, the elderly, and people with immune deficiencies. Also people and animals that are very stressed can be more likely to contract ringworm. The best way to prevent this is through good hygiene.

If you have any further questions about ringworm please feel free to contact us at (920) 668-6212 or send us an email at info@cgvet.com. You can also learn more about ringworm at <http://www.veterinarypartner.com/Content.plx?P=A&S=0&C=0&A=559>, <http://www.aspcare.org/pet-care/cat-care/ringworm>, or <http://mypeted.com/pet-health/articles/ringworm-in-dogs-and-cats/>.