

Ringworm

Background Information

Ringworm is a fungal skin disease of humans and other animals. It causes a characteristic ring-like red rash on the skin, which is not usually serious. It can be caught from infected animals.

Organism

Dermatophytes:

Trichophyton species

Microsporum species

Epidermophyton species (rare)

Incidence and Transmission

Ringworm is a common disease of people and animals.

It is very contagious and is easily spread from animals to people and from person to person. It can be spread via direct contact or by indirect contact, such as handling animal bedding or contaminated equipment.

The fungus forms spores which can survive for several months in the environment.

In animals ringworm appears as circular, dry, raised crusty lesions with hair loss. It can affect almost all mammals but is most common in cattle, horses and cats.

Occupations and processes where ringworm may present a risk

Occupational exposure to these fungi may occur in those who:

- are in contact with infected humans or animals – particularly cattle and horses; or
- are in contact with materials or products from infected animals – particularly activities that generate dust, such as cleaning out animal housing.

Occupations where there may be a risk of occupationally acquired ringworm include:

- farmers;
- veterinary surgeons;
- zookeepers;
- people working at horse stables;
- anyone working with animals – eg animal rescue centres;
- abattoir workers, meat processing plant workers and butchers; and

healthcare and care workers.

Clinical Information

The incubation period is usually 1–3 weeks. The infection appears as a ring-like red rash on the skin. It can be anywhere on the body, but is most common on the scalp, feet or groin. It is generally not a serious disease and can be treated with over the counter antifungal creams, although symptoms may persist for several months. Anyone with these symptoms on the scalp should visit their GP for a prescription of an antifungal agent.

Control

The following control measures reduce the risk of infection:

New animals should be isolated, particularly cattle and horses.

Good occupational hygiene practices should be followed, especially washing with warm water and soap.

Any cuts or abrasions should be covered with a waterproof dressing.

A suitable fungicide should be used for cleaning animal housing.

Protective gloves and overalls should be worn, especially when handling infected animals or cleaning out animal housing.

Animal housing should be vacuumed to remove fungal spores.

Grooming equipment, eg brushes, should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

Further Information

[NHS Choices – Ringworm](#)