

RINGWORM IN PETS

Although the name suggests otherwise, Ringworm isn't caused by worm at all. It's a skin fungal infection and the lesions are not always in the shape of ring. The scientific name for this disease is *Dermatophytosis*. Ringworm is commonly seen in many animals including dogs, cats, and farm animals. Young animals are most susceptible to infections. Ringworm is a common zoonotic disease transferred from animals to humans. People will sometimes pick up a case of Ringworm from their pet, but just because a pet has a Ringworm does not necessary mean that the people that interact with that pet will develop the problem. A dog or cat can transmit Ringworm to a person without showing any symptoms at all.

Cause

There are 3 most significant fungi causing this disease in dogs and cats:

- Microsporium canis* (most common cause of ringworm, dominant in cats)
- Mycrosporium gypseum* (can exist in the soil; dogs and cats digging contaminated soil are affected)
- Trichophyton mentagrophytes* (comes from rodents and affects dogs, cats and farm animals)

Symptoms

Classic symptoms of ringworm in cats and dogs include skin lesions that typically appear on the head, ears, tail and forelimbs. Ringworm can cause flaky bald patches that sometimes look red in the centre. In mild cases, there may be localized areas of redness or simply dandruff, while more severe infections can spread over a pet's entire body. It's also possible for a pet to carry ringworm spores and not show any symptoms whatsoever (no apparent lesions, but can transmit the infection to others).

Diagnosis

Most common way to diagnose Ringworm is with Wood's lamp (ultraviolet lamp). In about 60% of cases, the infected hair shafts will glow a bright green colour.

In some cases a fungal culture is required, in which a sample of your pet's hair and skin cells is placed on a special medium in an attempt to grow the fungus for both diagnosis and identification. Cultures can take several days to a couple of weeks. Sometimes, fungal material can also be seen directly under the microscope.



Treatment

- Starts with hair clipping to minimise spreading of "infective" material (hair with fungal spores) around.
- Usage of antifungal shampoo and antifungal cream.
- Oral medication in more severe cases (for example, "Oralfungol" liquid for cats, takes 5 weeks)
- Optional vaccine is available for dogs and cats and gives good results (if the cause is *Microsporium canis*)

Prevention

Ringworm spores can survive for up to one year and should be eliminated from the environment. This fungus is also very contagious between animals - humans and pets alike, so environmental decontamination is necessary. Killing the fungus and ridding it from the environment is difficult.

Here are some tips to help:

- confine contaminated pets to one room.
- vacuum deeply and often, taking care to dispose of vacuum bags or empty canisters.

- wash and disinfect all beddings and toys.
- wash applicable surfaces with soap and water and disinfect with a 1:10 diluted bleach solution (1 part bleach, 10 parts water)
- repeat these steps often until problem is resolved.
- strict hand-washing precautions are necessary to prevent human contamination.

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