

Feline Ringworm

Problem: Ringworm is the most common fungal infection in cats. Ringworm in cats can spread to other pets and humans so early detection and treatment is crucial. The fungus has a two week incubation period between exposure and the presence of symptoms but the fungus is transmissible before symptoms even occur. Severe cases of ringworm are more common in kittens and adult cats with poor immune systems. Ringworm does not involve any worms infecting the cat, rather it is named ringworm because of the circular rashes that can appear on the skin.

Symptoms:

- Flaky, circular bald spots surrounded by red rings (usually around the head, ears, forelimbs, whiskers, toes and tail)
- Broken and stubbly hair
- Alterations in hair or skin color
- Skin inflammation
- Excessive grooming
- Dandruff
- Infection of claws
- Dermatitis (ringworm can cause dermatitis in cats)

Diagnosis: Ringworm can be diagnosed by examining the cat's skin and coat with a Wood's lamp. This method may not always be effective, therefore, examining a skin culture in a laboratory is the preferred method of diagnosis.

Treatment: Treatments should be used for at least six weeks to ensure that the fungus is truly gone. Cat owners should use multiple treatment options to ensure the fungus is cured. Some treatments like oral medication and topical treatments will not fully treat the infection and should not be used alone. Treatment usually involves a topical anti-fungal medication, a systemic medication and a full body rinse or dip. Allowing your cat to **"self-resolve"** is **not recommended** as this process can take up to a year and the cat can lose a large amount of fur.

- Itraconazole. This is the preferred medication for treatment of ringworm. It's only known potential adverse reaction is anorexia.
- Terbinafine. This is an oral pill given twice a day for 2 weeks. The pill can stay effective for 5 weeks after treatment has ended. **Oral medication only kills the fungus internally.**
- Lime Sulphur dip. This is an effective, safe and inexpensive treatment that can be done at home. The dips should be given once a week until the cat's skin

culture comes back negative for ringworm and the dip should be used for all animals in the home. It is important to allow the dip to air dry on the cat's fur.

- Topical medication. Topical medication is less effective in cats than humans because the medication has difficulty seeping through the fur and there is a possibility of hidden lesions. The hairs around the lesions should be clipped away to make the topical medication more effective. **Topical medication only treats the hair follicles and does not cure the fungus.**
- Medicated shampoo baths. Recommended for all cats living in the home.
- Cleaning. Microscopic fungal spores can be shed from the infected cat into the environment and can stay in the environment for up to a year. Therefore, ringworm could come back after treatment if the spores are still in the atmosphere. The cat's bedding and toys should be washed and areas where cat hair accumulates should be regularly vacuumed.
- Decrease stress. Stress can lower the immune system and lead to further spread of the fungus.

Tips for shelters:

- Put infected cats in isolation to prevent further spread of ringworm. Provide this cat with enrichment so stress levels stay low.
- Note which cats came into the shelter together. The ringworm infection likely could have affected multiple cage mates.
- Use a lime Sulphur dip once you suspect a fungal infection. Use the lime Sulphur dip 2-4 times before allowing the cat to go to foster care.
- Clean the healthiest cats first.
- Wear separate clothing when handling cats with ringworm to prevent spread to non-infected cats.
- Make sure foster homes with infected cats are following the same cleaning procedures.

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