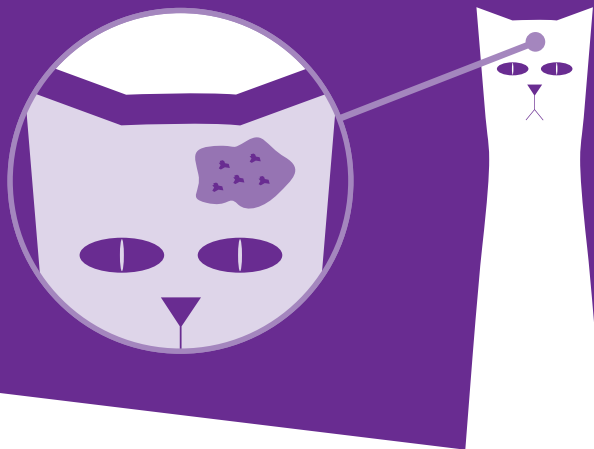


Ringworm



CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDES



Ringworm is the common name given to an infection of the surface of the skin, hair or nails with a type of fungus called a dermatophyte; it is not caused by a worm. There are different types of dermatophyte, some are more common in cats than others. They affect other animals and people too, so care should be taken when handling any suspected cases.

Which cats are most susceptible to ringworm infection?

Ringworm can affect any cat, but it is most often seen in:

- young or very old cats
- ill, debilitated cats, or those with an impaired immune system
- long-haired cats

How do cats catch ringworm?

The infective part of the fungus, called a spore, is shed on the hairs of affected animals or people and can survive, blown by the wind, for many months or even years. Cats become infected through exposure to these spores, either through contact with an infected animal or exposure to a contaminated object or environment. Cats with poor immune systems, sores on the skin or skin parasites such as fleas are more susceptible to infection.

Do all cats that come into contact with ringworm spores become infected?

No, some cats seem more resistant to infection, but they can still carry the spores so other cats or people may be infected.

What are the signs of ringworm?

Ringworm is most commonly seen on the face, ears and forelimbs but will be present throughout the coat. The fungus invades the hair shafts and surface layer of the skin leading to:

- itching
- hair loss
- crusting and scaling
- possible vomiting of hair balls or constipation – due to over-grooming because of itching

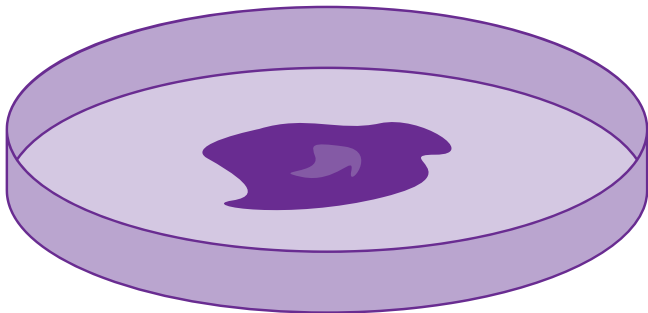
More unusual signs include scabs all over the body or sore, ulcerated areas of skin. Ringworm can sometimes mimic other skin diseases.

In affected people, the skin often shows small thickened red patches or patches of hair loss with scaling which may be itchy. Following exposure to spores, infection in people is more likely if they are children, very old or immunosuppressed, eg with HIV or receiving chemotherapy. Consult your doctor if you develop skin lesions.

How is ringworm in cats diagnosed?

There are various ways a cat can be tested for ringworm including:

- Woods lamp – a special-frequency, ultraviolet light is carefully shone at affected hairs to look for apple-green fluorescence. This does not give a definite result because not all types of ringworm fluoresce and sometimes skin debris or other infections can fluoresce.
- microscope examination of hairs – sometimes fungal spores can be seen attached to the hairs
- culture – brushings of the coat or crusts are cultured in a lab and if present, ringworm will grow (this may take up to 21 days)
- skin biopsy – occasionally a section of skin is needed for diagnosis when ringworm is suspected as a secondary problem to another disease



How is ringworm in cats treated?

Ringworm will spontaneously resolve in most healthy cats over a period of weeks or months. In addition, treatment is recommended to speed up this process and limit the risk of it spreading to humans and other animals. All cats in contact with ringworm-positive cats should also be treated as they are likely to be carrying the fungal spores without showing signs. They can re-infect themselves or other individuals. Treatment may include:

- antifungal medicine given by mouth. Treated cats often look better before they are completely free of the fungus (which can take several weeks). It is therefore recommended to have three consecutive negative culture results from hair brushings taken weekly before treatment is stopped
- topical treatment on the coat, eg shampoos or sprays, may be needed, in addition to treatment by mouth
- clipping of long-haired cats to help remove spores
- elimination of other problems affecting the skin, such as fleas or other skin diseases
- keeping affected cats in one room to reduce environmental build-up
- decontaminating the environment with thorough vacuuming and regular disinfection to remove spores. This is particularly important in multi-animal environments. Discard collars, brushes and fabric toys, use disposable bedding, clean non-porous surfaces with a 1:10 bleach solution (after testing an area first) and leave for at least ten minutes before rinsing. Allow the surfaces to dry before letting the cat have access to them and use disposable cloths

- not grooming affected cats until they are better (if possible), to reduce the risk of spreading spores through the coat or environment
- minimisation of direct contact with infected cats – wear rubber gloves and protective clothing to reduce the risk of human infection

Will my cat get better?

The majority of affected cats respond well to treatment and are cured in several weeks. Ringworm affecting a cat in a single-cat household is usually easily contained and managed.



What causes treatment failure in some cats?

It is extremely rare for ringworm not to resolve eventually in most affected cats. If initial treatment does fail it could be due to:

- re-infection occurring when a cat is exposed to a contaminated environment or other cats carrying the spores
- the cat being infected with a type of ringworm that is resistant to antifungal drugs
- the cat suffering with concurrent illness eg FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus), FeLV (Feline Leukaemia Virus) or another disease that suppresses his immune system and makes recovery more difficult
- the cat being treated for another illness with medication that suppresses their immune system and makes recovery more difficult

Can I protect my cat against ringworm?

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine to protect against ringworm.

This leaflet is one of a range provided by
Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare
charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens
each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to
finance this vital welfare work.

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