

Kent County Health Department
Ringworm Fact Sheet



What is ringworm?

Ringworm is a common skin disorder. It is caused by a fungus. It can affect skin on your body, scalp, groin area (jock itch), or feet (athlete's foot). Often several patches of ringworm are on your skin at once.

How do you get ringworm?

Ringworm can be passed from person to person by direct skin-to-skin contact. It can also be passed by having contact with items or surfaces such as combs, bed linens, stuffed animals, and shower and pool surfaces, an infected person has touched.

You can also catch ringworm from pets that carry the fungus. Cats are common carriers.

The fungi that cause ringworm thrive in warm, moist areas. Ringworm is more likely when you have frequent wetness (such as from sweating) and minor injuries to your skin, scalp, or nails.

What are the symptoms of ringworm?

The symptoms of ringworm include:

- Itchy, red, raised, scaly patches that may blister and ooze when the body is infected. The patches often have sharply-defined edges. They are often redder around the outside with normal skin tone in the center. This may create the appearance of a ring. The skin may also appear unusually dark or light.
- Scaly patches of temporary baldness when the scalp is infected.

- Scaling or cracking of the skin especially between the toes when the feet are infected.
- Discolored, thick and brittle nails when the nails are infected.

How soon do symptoms occur?

Scalp ringworm usually appears 10 to 14 days after contact. Ringworm of the skin usually appears 4 to 10 days after contact. The time between exposure and symptoms is not known for the other types of ringworm.

The Health Department does not diagnosis ringworm.

How is ringworm treated?

Ringworm usually responds well to self-care within four weeks without having to see a doctor.

- Keep your skin clean and dry.
- Apply over the counter antifungal or drying powders, lotions, or creams.
- Wash sheets and nightclothes every day while infected.

A severe or persistent infection may need treatment by a doctor. Antifungal pills may be given and are necessary if your hair is infected.

Infected pets should also be treated.

How can ringworm be prevented?

Ringworm is hard to prevent. The fungus is very common. It is contagious even before symptoms begin. To prevent ringworm:

Ringworm Fact Sheet – page 2

- Keep your skin and feet clean and dry.
- Shampoo regularly, especially after haircuts.
- Do not share clothing, towels, combs, hairbrushes, hats, or other personal items.
- Wear sandals or shoes at gyms, lockers and pools.
- Avoid touching pets with bald spots.
- Educate the public, especially parents, about the risk of ringworm from infected people and pets.
- Keep common-use areas clean, especially in schools, daycare centers, and locker rooms.

Do I need to keep my child home from school?

Children should be kept home from school until treatment has been started.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about ringworm or think you may have it, call your health care provider.