

# Ringworm

## What is ringworm?

Ringworm is a fungal infection of the skin. It is not a worm. It can be caused by several different organisms that belong to a group called dermatophytes. Different organisms affect different parts of the body and cause various types of ringworm:

- Ringworm of the scalp (tinea capitis)
- Ringworm of the body (tinea corporis)
- Ringworm of the foot (tinea pedis or "athlete's foot")
- Ringworm of the nails (tinea unguium)
- Ringworm of the groin (tinea cruris or "jock itch")

It is called Ringworm because the skin rash is most often round or oval with a raised border.

## What are the symptoms of ringworm?

Symptoms of Ringworm vary depending on the part of the body that is infected.

- **Ringworm of the scalp** usually begins as a small pimple that becomes larger, leaving scaly patches of temporary baldness. Yellowish crusty areas sometimes develop.
- **Ringworm of the body** is a flat, round patch anywhere on the skin except for the scalp and feet. As the rash gradually expands, its centre clears to produce a ring. More than one patch can occur and patches can overlap. It is sometimes itchy.
- **Ringworm of the foot**, or "athlete's foot", appears as itching, scaling and blisters which can lead to cracking of the skin, especially between the toes.
- **Ringworm of the nails** appears as thick, discolored, and brittle nails, or the affected nails may become chalky and disintegrate.

## People get ringworm from:

- Direct skin contact with an infected person or infected pet
- Indirect contact with an object or surface that has been contaminated by an infected person (hats, combs, brushes, bed linens, stuffed animals, gym mats, and sleeping cots).

## Who is at risk?

Children are most likely to get Ringworm. Outbreaks of Ringworm of the scalp have been identified in both child care centres and schools, and outbreaks of Ringworm of the scalp, body and foot have been identified in high school sports teams. Early recognition and treatment are needed to slow down the spread of infection.

## Treatment

Ringworm is treated with antifungal medication. A cream medication is applied directly to the infection or sometimes a pill is taken by mouth.

There are no long-term complications from Ringworm. However, it may be difficult to clear up a Ringworm infection.

## Prevention

Ringworm is difficult to prevent. The fungus is common, and it is contagious before symptoms appear.

- **Thorough handwashing** is the way to prevent the spread of infections.

**The best handwashing technique includes 6 steps:**

- **Wet hands** with warm running water
- **Apply liquid soap**
- **Lather hands and scrub for 20 seconds**
- **Rinse** under running water
- **Dry** your hands with paper towels
- **Use the towel to turn off the taps**

**An alcohol-based hand rub can be added to your hand hygiene routine:**

- **Apply the sanitizer to your hands.** About a thumbnail size amount is sufficient.
- **Rub your hands together until the alcohol has evaporated.** Hands will feel dry in about 15 seconds.

- **Ensure all infected persons are appropriately treated.**
- **Children should not return to school or child care until after treatment has started.**
- **Avoid contact sports, activities that share equipment and swimming** until the infection has been treated to prevent spread of the infection to others.
- **Do not share personal items** such as towels, clothing, hats or hairbrushes.
- **Clean and sanitize** common use areas, especially in schools and child care centres. Use a disinfectant that is labeled to kill fungi (fungicide). Follow the instructions carefully, and leave the disinfectant on the surface for the minimum amount of time the label advises.
  - Regular cleaning schedules in schools and child care should be enhanced during the time of a ringworm outbreak.  
A 1:100 household bleach solution (approximately 500 ppm) is recommended for use and can be prepared by mixing 62 ml (1/4 cup) household bleach with 6138 ml (24 3/4 cups) water.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to [www.healthunit.com](http://www.healthunit.com)

Reference:

Heymann, D. L. (Ed.). (2015). *Control of communicable diseases manual* (20<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

Medline Plus. *Medical Encyclopedia: Ringworm*. Retrieved on May 26, 2015 from <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001439.htm>

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