



# Ringworm Prevention

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Most animal owners know their pets and livestock can catch and/or spread diseases to other animals. However, many people don't realize animals can also pass diseases to humans.

Ringworm is a fungal disease that infects the outer layers of skin and the hair or wool shaft. This parasitic fungus can affect any domestic animal, including livestock and pets, as well as humans.

Because people can easily catch this disease from their pets or show animals at fairs and other events, ringworm-infected animals pose a public health problem.

That's why anyone who handles animals should be aware of the signs of ringworm.

## How is ringworm spread?

Direct body contact between animals or people and animals is just one way the highly contagious ringworm fungus spreads.

Infected animals can also contaminate their environment (wash racks, pens, trailers, pastures, etc.) as they shed fungus spores, skin scales and hair fibers. Likewise, sharing equipment and show supplies, such as brushes, clippers, combs, blankets and halters, can spread the disease.

What's more, humans handling infected animals can carry ringworm to other animals. That's why animal

health officials are adamant about barring infected animals from exhibitions, where judges and visitors frequently touch many different animals.

## Signs of ringworm.

Ringworm appears as a patch of thick, scaly skin, causing a loss of wool or hair. Oozing or redness may occur at the site. The disease typically, but not always, appears as a round lesion that varies in size. The disease derives its name from the circular pattern it creates, that was once thought to be caused by insect larvae.

Lesions appear 10 days to four weeks after exposure to the fungus. Without treatment, the patches disappear in four weeks to eight weeks. Wool or hair may regrow within eight weeks to 16 weeks.

Once the skin is no longer thickened or scaly, and lost hair has regrown, the lesion is virtually cleared of infection.

## How is ringworm treated?

No medication will cure ringworm. However, some topical treatments may shorten the course of the infection. Suspicious lesions on pets and livestock should be examined by a veterinarian who can make a diagnosis.

## THE FACTS

- Any animal—pets or livestock—can get ringworm.
- Humans are susceptible, too.
- Ringworm is actually a highly contagious fungus, also called dermatophytosis.
- Contaminated equipment, pens, blankets, etc. can spread the disease.

A person who shows signs resembling ringworm should consult a physician.

### Concerns about ringworm.

Ringworm lesions can become infected with other types of bacteria, resulting in further, secondary health problems. Heavy or facial infections can slow an animal's rate of gain. What's more, lesions can damage an animal's hide and coat.

One of the most important aspects of animal ringworm is its risk to public health. Humans can easily pick up the fungus by touching, handling or cleaning infected pets and livestock. Infectious hairs or skin particles that have fallen off of infected animals can also spread the disease. If pens or barns are not properly cleaned and disinfected, the fungus can linger for years, causing persistent reinfections.

Young people, especially small children, are more susceptible to ringworm than adults. Lesions are often severe, causing inflammation and some scarring.

Young people are also vulnerable, because they often rub their faces while grooming animals or exhibiting in the show ring. This simple act can transfer the infection from the animal to the person's face or scalp, with potentially severe consequences.

Exhibitors should understand that any animal with suspicious ringworm lesions being brought to an



Lesions on a dog give a patchy appearance.

exhibition may be asked to leave the premises to protect other animals and people.

Lesions may ooze



## PRACTICAL PREVENTION

- Never borrow or share clippers, combs, blankets or other grooming equipment.
- Clean and disinfect all equipment and pens before each use.
- Inspect, then separate new animals for 2 to 3 weeks; watch for symptoms.

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