

Ringworm in Cats

Overview

- Ringworm is a fungal skin infection.
- It causes hair loss and red, crusty skin (sometimes in a circular pattern).
- Ringworm is very contagious and can easily spread to humans and other species.
- It can take a several weeks to cure ringworm, but treatment is effective in most cases.
- Contact your vet if you think your cat has ringworm

What is ringworm?

Despite its name, ringworm is **not actually a worm and it isn't always ring shaped!** It's a **fungal** infection that causes raised, crusty, hairless patches of skin, sometimes in a ring-like pattern.



A cat with ringworm over its head, face and ears.

Ringworm doesn't only infect cats. It also affects and spreads between humans and other animals such as dogs, rodents, horses and cattle.

Ringworm in cats is very contagious. It can spread through direct contact, but can also live on surfaces such as bedding, towels and grooming equipment for up to two years.

Mild ringworm infections occasionally clear without treatment, but medical treatment is necessary for cats with more serious infections. Kittens, senior cats, and cats that are otherwise unwell are most at risk of serious ringworm infections.

Symptoms

Ringworm symptoms in cats often include:

- Patches of raised, red, crusty skin
- [Alopecia \(fur loss\)](#)
- [Dandruff](#)
- [Mildly itchy skin](#)



Severe ringworm infection on a cat's ear

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet for an appointment if your cat has any of the signs listed above, or you think they may have ringworm. Your vet will use a special lamp to look for ringworm and/or take some hair/skin samples to send away for investigation.

Treatment

Treatment for ringworm can take several weeks to work but is successful in most cases. Your cat is likely to need a medicated shampoo, antifungal medication and their coat clipped. It's also important to disinfect your home and have any other pets checked by your vet.

- **Coat clipping** - your cat's fur may need to be clipped to stop their ringworm spreading and make sure skin treatments work properly.
- **Medicated shampoo** - you will need to give your cat an anti-fungal bath one to two times a week until their infection has fully cleared (this often takes a few weeks).
- **Treatment by mouth** - it's possible that your cat will need a daily anti-fungal medicine by mouth (often for a month or more).
- **Treating the house** - ringworm can live in the environment for up to two years, so during your cat's treatment it's important to regularly decontaminate your household by vacuuming, cleaning and washing bedding/soft furnishings.

Preventing spread

Ringworm is particularly contagious in cats so until their infection has cleared up, it's important to take precautions to prevent it spreading to other pets and people. If possible, keep your cat away from other pets, wear disposable gloves when handling them, and hot wash any clothes or towels they touch.

Outlook

It can take a few weeks to cure ringworm, but treatment is effective in most cases. However, ringworm can be persistent so you will need to keep an eye out for any returning symptoms. Cats are more prone to ringworm if they are 'run-down' by another illness, so if your cat is struggling to recover your vet may want to run some tests to investigate for other problems.

Can humans get ringworm?

Yes. Humans can catch ringworm in the same way animals can (from an animal, human or surface infected with ringworm). If you think you might have ringworm, contact your local health care services or [the NHS](#) for advice.

Cost

Treatment for ringworm can become very expensive because it often requires a several weeks of treatment, check-ups and tests. It's important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your cat. There are often several treatment options so if one doesn't work for you and your cat then the vet may be able to offer another.

Consider [insuring your cat](#) as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This will ensure you have all the support you need to care for them.

Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?

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