

RINGWORM (Fungal Infection of the Skin)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

DESCRIPTION

Fungal (tinea) infection of the skin. Ringworm is transmitted by person-to-person contact or by contact with infected surfaces, such as towels, shoes, or shower stalls. It is found almost everywhere. Ringworm can involve the scalp, skin, groin (jock itch), nails, feet (athletes foot), and skin with beard.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Lesions that itch (sometimes) and have the following characteristics:

- On the scalp - lesions cause patchy hair loss and scaling scalp.
- On body skin - lesions are red, circular, flat, scaling and have well-defined borders.
- On the bearded area of the face - lesions cause an itchy, scaly rash under the beard.
- On the feet - in the skin between the toes, cracked, blistered, itchy rash.
- Of the nails - thickened, yellow dull nails with crusting at the free edge.

CAUSES

Fungal infection with one or more of five different fungi. They are found almost everywhere. Transmission is by person-to-person contact or by contact with infected surfaces, such as towels, shoes, or shower stalls. Worms have nothing to do with the infection.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Crowded living conditions.
- Contact with infected animals.
- Day care centers or schools.
- Immunosuppression due to illness or drugs.
- Chronic moisture and irritation of the skin.
- Warm, humid climates

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The fungi are so prevalent that total prevention is impossible.

To minimize risk:

- Get treatment for pets that have skin problems.
- Carefully dry feet after bathing, showering or swimming.
- Good personal hygiene.
- Don't share headgear (hats, combs, brushes).
- Avoid tight shoes or underwear that may rub or irritate the skin.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Usually curable with treatment, but may take weeks to months depending on location. Recurrence is common and ringworm becomes chronic in 20% of cases.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Secondary bacterial infection of ringworm lesions.

GENERAL MEASURES

Diagnostic tests may include microscopic exam of skin scrapings (culture of skin) under a special light. Treatment is usually with topical medications. Other specific care depends on location of infection.

- For infection on the body, carefully launder all clothing, towels or bed linens that have touched the lesions. Keep the skin dry.
- For infection of the scalp, shampoo the hair every day. Have the hair cut short, but don't shave the scalp. Repeat this procedure every 2 weeks, or whenever the hair grows back
- For infected feet, expose feet to air whenever possible, wear sandals or leather shoes, wear cotton socks, wash and dry feet at least twice a day. For infected beard, let beard grow. If necessary to shave, use electric shaver and not a blade. For nail infection, keep nails short.

MEDICATION

Topical antifungal drugs in the form of creams, lotions, or ointments. Treatment may continue after symptoms disappear to eradicate the fungi and prevent recurrence. In widespread infections or nail infections, an oral antifungal may be prescribed.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- You have symptoms of ringworm.
- Lesions become redder, painful, and ooze pus.
- Symptoms don't improve in three or four weeks.

Student Health Center

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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.



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Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.