

Ringworm

What is ringworm?

Ringworm is a rash caused by a fungus that has infected your skin. (Despite its name, this rash is **not** caused by a worm or parasite.)

What is the cause?

Ringworm is spread by contact with an infected person or infected surface, such as clothes, towels, and bedding. It is more common among people participating in sports that involve a lot of contact with other people, such as wrestling. Children going to day care and people living in crowded conditions are also more likely to get ringworm.

Because ringworm is caused by a fungus it is more likely to occur in warm humid climates where fungus grows more easily.

Ringworm on the skin is called tinea corporis. When ringworm is on the feet, it is called tinea pedis, and when it is on the scalp, it is called tinea capitis. The fungus can also infect the inner thighs and groin. This type of ringworm is called jock itch or tinea cruris.

What are the symptoms?

The rash caused by a ringworm infection is usually round or oval and has a raised border. It starts small and slowly grows larger. As it grows, the central part of the rash usually becomes clear. The rash may itch and the skin may become scaly. There may be some small, pus-filled bumps. Over time the rash spreads from one part of the body to other parts.

Ringworm on the scalp usually causes patches of hair loss.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and examine you. Often the diagnosis is clear from the way the rash looks. Your provider may scrape the skin and look at it under a microscope or use an ultraviolet (UV) light to look for ringworm on the scalp.

How is it treated?

The treatment of ringworm depends on your health and how much the infection has spread on your skin or scalp. Most of the time putting a nonprescription antifungal cream on the area of the rash once or twice a day is all that is needed. Rub the cream in well and apply it an inch beyond the border of the rash. It's important to keep using the medicine for a week after the rash goes away to make sure the fungus is completely gone.

In some cases, your healthcare provider may prescribe a medicine to take by mouth. You may be given oral medicine, for example, if you have the rash on your

scalp or in several different places or if your immune system is weak and you have trouble fighting infections.

How long will the effects last?

Ringworm may take several weeks to clear up with a cream, depending on the extent of the rash. If you are given an oral medicine, it may clear up faster. It's common to get it again after you've had it. Sometimes it becomes a long-term problem.

How can I take care of myself?

- Try to keep your skin dry. Fungus grows well on damp skin.
- Use the medicine as prescribed. If you are using the cream, remember to rub it in well.
- For scalp infections, follow the instructions your healthcare provider gives you about how often to shampoo and which shampoo to use. It may help to have your hair cut short to help the scalp stay dry, but don't shave your head.
- If you have ringworm in your beard and decide to shave your beard instead of just cutting it short, use an electric razor instead of a blade.
- Ask your healthcare provider what symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them.

What can I do to help prevent ringworm?

- Wash all clothes, towels, and bedding that might have come into contact with the infected area on your skin.
- If you do sports such as wrestling, gymnastics, or martial arts, make sure that the mats and any other equipment are cleaned regularly.
- Don't share personal-care products or clothes with others if you or they have a rash.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after touching an infected area and dry your hands well.

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