



Frequently asked questions about

Ringworm

From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

What is Ringworm? Ringworm of the body is one of several forms of ringworm, a fungal infection that develops on the top layer of your skin. It's characterized by an itchy, red circular rash with healthy-looking skin in the middle. Ringworm gets its name from the characteristic ring that can appear, but it has nothing to do with an actual worm under your skin. Ringworm of the body is closely related to other fungal infections with similar names, which include:

- **Athlete's foot** - affects the moist areas between your toes and sometimes on your foot itself.
- **Jock itch** - affects your genitals, inner upper thighs and buttocks.
- **Ringworm of the scalp** - is most common in children and involves red, itchy patches on the scalp, leaving bald patches

What are the signs and symptoms of ringworm?

- A circular rash on your skin that's red and inflamed around the edge and healthy looking in the middle
- Slightly raised expanding rings of red, scaly skin on your trunk or face
- A round, flat patch of itchy skin
- More than one patch of ringworm may appear on your skin, and patches or red rings of rash may overlap. You can have a ringworm infection without having the common red ring of ringworm.

Do I need to see a doctor? See your doctor if you have a rash on your skin that doesn't improve within two weeks. You may need prescription medication. If excessive redness, swelling, drainage or fever occurs, see your doctor immediately. Fungal infections, such as ringworm, are caused by microorganisms that stay on your body. These mold-like fungi live on the cells in the outer layer of your skin. Ringworm is contagious and can be spread in the following ways:

- **Human to human.** Ringworm often spreads by direct, skin-to-skin contact with an infected person.
- **Animal to human.** You can contract ringworm by touching an animal with ringworm. Ringworm can spread while petting or grooming dogs or cats. You can also get ringworm from ferrets, rabbits, goats, pigs and horses.
- **Object to human.** Ringworm can spread by contact with objects or surfaces that an infected person or animal has recently touched or rubbed against, such as clothing, towels, bedding and linens, combs, or brushes.
- **Soil to human.** In rare cases, ringworm can be spread to humans by contact with infected soil. Infection would most likely occur only from prolonged contact with highly infected soil.

What may put me at higher risk of getting Ringworm? You're at higher risk of ringworm of the body if you:

- Live in damp, humid or crowded conditions
- Have close contact with an infected person or animal
- Share clothing, bedding or towels with someone who has a fungal infection
- Sweat excessively
- Participate in contact sports, such as wrestling, football or rugby
- Wear tight or restricted clothing
- Have a weakened immune system

Are there complications associated with Ringworm?

A fungal infection rarely spreads below the surface of the skin to cause serious illness. However, people with weak immune systems, such as those with HIV/AIDS, may find it difficult to get rid of the infection

Is there treatment if I have Ringworm?

If ringworm of the body covers a large area, is severe or doesn't respond to over-the-counter medicine, you may need a prescription-strength topical medication (lotion, cream or ointment) or an oral medication (pill, capsule or tablet). Many options are available, including several topical treatments as well as a number of oral medications. Talk with your doctor for the best course of action for you.

How can I prevent getting Ringworm in the first place?

Ringworm is difficult to prevent. The fungus that causes ringworm is common and contagious even before symptoms appear. However, you can help reduce your risk of ringworm by taking these steps:

- **Educate yourself and others.**
- **Keep clean.** Wash your hands often to avoid the spread of infection. Keep common or shared areas clean, especially in schools, child care centers, gyms and locker rooms.
- **Stay cool and dry.** Don't wear thick clothing for long periods of time in warm, humid weather.
- **Avoid infected animals.** The infection often looks like a patch of skin where fur is missing. Ask your veterinarian to check your pets and domesticated animals for ringworm.
- **Don't share personal items.** Don't let others use your clothing, towels, hairbrushes or other personal items. Refrain from borrowing these items from others as well

For more information about the flu and other important health information, visit us on the web

www.bhsj.org

Or call your local Health Department office at:

Coldwater
279-9561 x 143

Hillsdale
437-7395 x 110

Three Rivers
273-2161 x 241