



May 2010

# Ringworm

## What is Ringworm?

Ringworm is a fungal infection of the skin, not an actual worm. The infection causes a ring-shaped rash with red raised edges. It can be quite itchy and flaky. Ringworm can affect many areas of the body, including the head and scalp, the body, the feet, the nails or the groin. Symptoms may vary with the location affected:

- **Head and scalp** - small raised sores on scalp leaving scaly patches of baldness. The incubation period is usually 10-14 days.
- **Body** - flat ring-shaped sores with reddened edges. May be blister-like or dry and crusty. The incubation period is 4-10 days.
- **Feet** - scaling or cracking of skin between toes, under and around toenails. It can be very itchy. The incubation period is unknown.
- **Nails** – become discoloured, thick and even crumble.

## How is it spread?

- The fungus grows very well in warm, moist areas and is capable of surviving in contaminated material for long periods of time.
- Ringworm and other fungal infections may remain infective to others as long as lesions are present and viable fungus remains on contaminated materials.
- Fungal spores can remain infective for months or years in dry, cool, shaded areas.
- **Head and scalp** – Direct skin-to-skin or indirect contact, especially from the backs of seats, barber clippers, toilet articles (combs, hairbrushes), clothing and hats that are contaminated with hair from infected people or animals. Vigorous brushing, combing or patting can cause the fungal spores to become airborne and contaminate the surrounding area.
- **Body** – Direct or indirect contact with skin and scalp lesions of infected people or lesions of animals, contaminated floors, shower stalls, benches and similar articles.
- **Feet** – Direct or indirect contact with skin lesions of infected people, or with contaminated floors, shower stalls, and other articles used by infected people.
- **Nails** – Most likely as a result of direct contact with skin or nail lesions of infected people and animals, or from indirect contact (contaminated floors and shower stalls). There is a low rate of transmission, even to family or household members.
- Animals can carry some types of fungi on their fur or skin without showing signs of ringworm infection. Sick or carrier animals can transmit fungi to people by direct or indirect (hair or dander) contact.

## What should I do if my child or I get Ringworm?

- See your doctor for assessment and to discuss treatment options
- To avoid spreading ringworm to others:
- Follow your doctor's advice for proper treatment
- Keep skin, hair and nails dry and clean
- Practise proper hand washing, especially after touching the infected skin
- If you are being treated for ringworm you may attend school once you start taking medication. However, while under treatment, infected persons should not be in swimming pools or participate in activities (e.g., gyms, common areas) likely to lead to exposure of others
- Wash towels and clothing in hot water and soap or fungicidal agent to destroy the fungus
- Do not share combs, hairbrushes, hats or hair accessories if you have an infection on the scalp
- Do not share clothes if you have an infection of the skin
- Do not walk barefoot on the locker room or shower floors if you have the infection on your feet
- Vacuum carpeted areas and upholstered furniture

## How is Ringworm prevented?

- Avoid touching an infected area, and if you do touch it, wash hands well using soap and water.
- Keep common-use areas clean and wear appropriate footwear when using public showers.
- Avoid sharing personal items, such as hair care articles, towels, clothing, and shoes.
- Have pets with skin rashes examined by a veterinarian. If the pet's rash is caused by a fungus, children should avoid touching the animal until treatment has started, the rash is healing and the pet has been bathed. Avoid touching pets that have medication on their skin.

For further information, please call:  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

