



Ringworm

Ringworm is not a worm at all, but a fungus. It can affect dogs, cats, horses, guinea pigs and people. This fungus can be found in the soil and other species of the fungus have adapted to live solely on animals. Some species of the fungus can be transmitted from pets to people or from people to pets.

The fungus "lives" on the surface of the skin, inside the hair shafts and around nail beds. A classic lesion in a pet is a rapidly expanding circular patch on the skin with hair loss and redness. Some animals can carry the fungus without showing any signs at all. Diagnosis is made by fungal culture. This is a simple test to perform, but may take up to three weeks to evaluate as the fungi do not always grow rapidly on culture media.

Treatment for ringworm consists of medicated shampoos, clipping hair coats, topical medications and/or oral medications. Appropriate sanitation measures at home are needed as the fungus can survive in the environment. Brushes, combs and pet bedding should be thoroughly disinfected or replaced. Vacuuming daily, including furniture, should be done and the bag disposed of each time. Professional cleaning of household ductwork may be needed in extreme cases.

Some people, especially children and the immunocompromised, are particularly susceptible to the fungus. Anyone handling pets with ringworm should wash their hands well using dilute betadine solution or iodine soap. Their human medical professional should be consulted.

The prognosis for pets with ringworm is usually good. Few pets can remain as carriers and continuously expose other pets and people to the fungus.