

Ringworm in Cats

Ringworm is the common name given to a fungus skin infection called dermatophytosis. Ringworm can be passed from cats to people so care should be taken when handling any suspected cases.

Cats become infected through exposure to the spores of this fungus by contact with an infected animal, object such as a grooming brush or from the environment. Young/old cats or sick cats and cats with poor immune systems are more susceptible as are long haired cats. Cats can carry the ringworm infection without showing any symptoms. Ringworm is contagious and cats can still be carriers infecting other cats and people: children and people with a compromised immune system are particularly at risk. Ringworm spores can live on in the environment for up to two years.

Ringworm will resolve itself without treatment but it will take much longer for all the cats to recover and put people at a higher risk because of this.

Symptoms

Signs of Ringworm can include: hair loss and itching, skin lesions, crusting or scaling of the skin sometimes with inflammation but symptoms can be very variable. Typically roughly circular areas of hair loss can be seen on head, ears or paws.

Diagnosis

Ringworm can be tested by use of an ultra violet Wood lamp, but this does not give a definite result as not all types of ringworm fluoresce.

Microscopic examination of hairs, but this may not always spot the fungal spores as the sample did not include infected hairs.

Culture from whole body brushings of the cats coat or crusts is the most reliable test and will identify the specific species of Ringworm involved. This test/s are the one required by Felis Britannica. Fungal cultures have to be grown in a lab and usually take several weeks to produce a result.

Treatment

Your veterinary will advise on the appropriate treatment regime and this should be followed. Treatment will probably involve the following:

Antifungal medicine given by mouth, your veterinary will advise what is appropriate.

Treated cats can look better before the ringworm has cleared, so it is required by FB that two consecutive negative fungal cultures with 8 weeks between them are obtained and treatment as prescribed continued during that time.

Topical treatment such as shampoos and sprays will also be needed, your veterinary will advise what is appropriate.

Long haired cats especially may need their fur clipped, your veterinary will explain how best to do this as it may be necessary to sedate the cat/s.

Keep infected cats separate from other cats/animals whenever possible.

Decontamination of the environment by vacuuming thoroughly and regular disinfection to remove spores. All toys, bedding and brushes should be disposed of preferably by burning and then use disposable bedding. Clean non porous surfaces with 1.10 bleach solution (use disposable cloths) and leave for 10 minutes before rinsing. Allow surfaces to completely dry before letting the cat/s access.

To reduce the possibility of human infection wear rubber gloves and protective clothing when handling infected cats.

If possible confine the cats to a room or other accommodation that will minimise their contact with people.

If one cat in a household is diagnosed as having ringworm then all the other animals in the household will need to be culture tested and treated. In multi cat house holds resolution will be achieved quicker if all cats are treated immediately without waiting for a positive culture result for each cat.

Your vet should be advised if your Queen is pregnant or there are kittens in the household as they may need special consideration in their treatment.

What can be done to prevent ringworm infection

New cats coming into the household should be isolated until the results of a fungus culture shows they are negative for ringworm.

Do not share grooming equipment at cat shows.

After a cat show bathing or spraying with an antifungal agent will help prevent spores starting an infection. This can also be done after a cat returns home from another cattery or the veterinary surgery- anywhere they may have come into contact with other cats.

Please see FB, Veterinary Rules for FB policy and procedures in the reporting and treatment of cats owned by FB members suspected or diagnosed with ringworm.

FB, BH&WC August 2013