

# Foster – Ringworm

## What is ringworm?

Ringworm, or scientifically known as dermatophytosis, is a fungal infection that affects the skin of animals and humans. In animals, the skin lesions may have the appearance of patchy fur loss with dry scaly skin, most common on the ears, face, paws and tail. In humans the lesion is more commonly the classic round, red bullseye type appearance. Because the ring of irritated, itchy skin looked like a worm, the infection was erroneously named.

## Who can get ringworm?

Most animals and humans can be at risk for contracting ringworm. Infection develops when damaged/abraded skin comes into contact with a fungal spore. Spores may be encountered from direct contact with an infected animal (symptomatic or an asymptomatic carrier) or the environment. Some animals and humans with compromised immune symptoms may be at a greater risk of contracting infection if exposed. This may include young or old animals, children or elderly humans, cats with FIV or humans with HIV or other immune compromising diseases, those receiving chemotherapy or taking other immune suppressive medications, and highly stressed people and animals may be at higher risk.

## Are the humans and animals in my home at risk?

Yes. If you do take home a ringworm positive animal to foster, it is necessary to keep them isolated in a room/area that can easily be cleaned and disinfected and does not allow for contact or interaction with other animals in the home. Proper personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, shoe covers, gowns may be necessary to protect yourself and minimize risk of exposure to others in the home. Any PPE, bedding, or other items the infected animal comes into contact with should be disposed of or laundered/cleaned properly to avoid transmission.

## How is ringworm treated?

Your foster animal will be treated with topical medication, either in the form of a dip/bath for generalized treatment, or in some cases, a lotion for localized lesions. They may also be treated with an oral medication in addition to the topical treatment. You will be provided with schedules, medications, and directions for your foster animal.

Most animals will be treated with lime sulfur dips. These dips will be scheduled typically 1-2 times per week. This medication has a strong odor of rotten eggs. It will stain clothing and jewelry (even through gloves) and for animals with white/light fur, it will temporarily stain them yellow.

Directions on mixing the dip and application will be provided to you. It is important that the dip NOT be rinsed off or shampooed after application. The animal may be towel dried.

Treatment often takes several weeks to months depending on the severity and extent of the lesions.

## How to clean your home?

Infected animals are constantly shedding spores into the environment which can continue to reinfect the animal or infect new animals or humans. Disinfection of the environment is just as important as treatment of the infected animal. Each time the animal receives a lime sulfur dip, its living space should be cleaned and thoroughly disinfected. A dipped animal should always be placed back into a clean environment.

General cleaning of the environment should always precede disinfection. Clean with a detergent or soap to remove organic debris as disinfection will not work if the surface is not clean first. Vigorous vacuuming, for at least 10 minutes, may be one of the most important aspects of cleaning the environment. Steam cleaning of carpets may also be done if able. If a vacuum bag is used, it should be discarded each time. If the vacuum has a canister, the canister and filters should be cleaned and disinfected each time. Wood floors can be decontaminated with daily use of electrostatic cloth, such as a Swiffer, and twice weekly wood soap cleanings. Laundry can be decontaminated by running it through a wash cycle twice, bleach may be used if applicable and will not damage the fabric. For surfaces able to be bleached, after cleaning with soap and water, a 1:10 solution of bleach should be used. The surface should stay wet for a total of 10 minutes to kill the ringworm spores. Bleach will not kill spores in the presence of dirt so it is important that the surface be properly cleaned before it is bleached.

Ringworm spores can remain in the environment for up to 18 months, possibly longer, if not cleaned and disinfected properly.

The Shelter Medical Team or Foster Manager may ask you to test the environment following cleaning and disinfection to ensure the environment has been disinfected properly and does not pose an ongoing risk to you or other people and animals in the home. Information and supplies will be provided if this is requested.

## How do we know when the ringworm has been properly treated?

You will be provided with instruction and supplies to collect samples for recheck cultures. The rechecks must occur within 24 hours of the animal receiving a lime sulfur dip and being placed back into a clean and disinfected environment. The samples will be collected directly from the animal using a toothbrush. It is important that the toothbrush not be contaminated before or after collecting the sample and be promptly brought back to the shelter to be cultured. A culture needs to incubate for 2 weeks before it can be considered negative if no growth or color change has occurred. However, a positive result may be obtained sooner than 2 weeks. The animal will continue to be treated until 2 negative cultures have been obtained.

**If your foster animal shows signs of illness**, please contact HSHV's Foster Care Manager