

# Ringworm

Ringworm is a skin infection caused by a dermatophyte (skin 'loving') fungus. The fungi which cause ringworm in horses include the *Microsporum* and *Trichophyton* species, which can infect not only horses but other animal species, including humans. The skin lesions (pathological abnormalities) usually start as small raised spots from which the hair is lost. These spread from these spots and usually become scurfy or a thick dry crumbly scab may form. Sometimes the lesions are sore and sometimes itchy. In many cases there may only be a couple of lesions but if left untreated and especially if spread by grooming, the condition can become extensive. The infection is highly contagious and whole groups of horses can become affected in an outbreak.



Ringworm is transmitted from horse to horse by direct contact between horses, tack, grooming equipment, clothing, contact with infested stables or trailers. The fungi are quite resistant to environmental factors and can remain on fence railings and timber structures for long periods. The most common method of spread is on tack such as bridles, boots, girths and grooming equipment. The fungi can remain on the skin for up to three weeks before clinical signs develop so the disease can be spread before there are signs of infection. Very often it is a new horse which introduces the condition to a yard. Younger animals are more likely to be affected than older ones, although very old or debilitated animals are also susceptible. Infection produces immunity which is quite long-lasting.

Most commonly, treatment is by washing or rinsing the affected areas with specific anti-fungal solutions. There are several available but no one product will successfully cure all cases and it may be necessary to try two or more different treatments before one is successful. Most of these solutions are applied on two or more separate occasions over a week or more. It is important that all scabs, scurfy skin and debris are removed before treatment is applied or the fungi will be protected from the effects of the medication.

If you suspect ringworm, ensure that the affected horse is treated and that it has its own grooming kit and tack, which should not be used on any other horse. Treatment should commence immediately and the grooming kit, rugs and tack thoroughly disinfected during and after treatment. Equipment used for treating the affected horse should not be used on other horses and should be disinfected or disposed of after treatment has ceased. Handlers should use gloves when dealing with affected horses and, where possible, these should be dealt with last.

It is possible but uncommon for people to catch ringworm from horses. The lesions are usually itchy and red patches or 'rings' may form and can occur anywhere on the body. Your doctor should be consulted to confirm the diagnosis and for a suitable treatment.

