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Cat Haven Information Sheet –RINGWORM/DERMATOPHYTOSIS

What is "ringworm"?

"Ringworm" (dermatophytosis) is a type of infectious fungal disease involving the hair, skin and nails/claws. *Microsporum canis* is the most common fungus responsible for the infection, accounting for 94-99% of feline infections.

How is infection spread?

The infective stage of the "ringworm" fungus is the spore. Spores are microscopic and therefore cannot be seen with the naked eye. They can be spread to a healthy animal by direct contact with an infected animal, or indirectly via a contaminated environment or inanimate object (such as clothing). They can be carried on air currents, dust particles, and fleas. Spores can remain viable in the environment for up to 18 months.

Any cat that comes into contact with spores is at risk for developing "ringworm"; however there is increased risk associated with being very young or very old, poor nutrition, presence of external parasites (eg. fleas), immunosuppression (eg. FIV), and living in multi-cat facilities/households. Long haired cats, especially Persians and Himalayans are also at increased risk of developing the disease.

The incubation period (the time between infection and appearance of signs of disease) is 1-3 weeks.

What are the signs of infection?

The signs of infection are extremely variable however a common presentation is an irregular or circular patch of peripherally expanding hair loss with scale, crusting and sometimes redness of the skin. The face and distal limbs are most commonly affected, especially in kittens. Itchiness may or may not be noted in cats with "ringworm".

How is it diagnosed?

Use of a Wood's lamp is a commonly used, quick and easy technique that may be used in the diagnosis of ringworm; however this may result in detection of approximately only 50% of cases. Fungal culture is also commonly used and is regarded as the most reliable diagnostic test; however it can take up to 4 weeks to get results. Due to these difficulties that can be encountered with diagnosis, treatment may be initiated without a definitive diagnosis.

How is it treated?

"Ringworm" is considered a self-limiting disease (most healthy cats that do not receive treatment will recover within several months) however it is usually treated for the following reasons:

- To minimise the risk of spreading to people
- To minimise the risk of spreading to other animals
- To decrease contamination of the environment
- To minimise the severity and duration of lesions of those infected

Treatment usually involves topical medication (eg. Malaseb) and oral medication. **Topical creams (eg. Canesten) are not recommended.**

Can "ringworm" be spread to people?

Yes! "Ringworm" is a zoonotic disease (a disease of animals that can be transmitted to humans), and is spread to people in the same manner as for cats. Exposure to the organism does not necessarily result in infection; however there is an increased risk of developing infection in people that are immunosuppressed, very young, or very old.

The signs of infection in people are ring shaped areas of scaling and hair loss, with or without redness, crusting and itching. If you are at all concerned you have developed ringworm please visit your GP.