

Managing Ringworm at Home

What is Ringworm: Ringworm is actually a fungus and not a worm. Ringworm is a highly contagious zoonotic disease – this means it doesn't just affect a certain type of animal; humans, dogs, cats, rabbits and wild animals can all catch it. In the majority of cases it is easily cured in humans, and with most things, the earlier it is identified the less of an issue it will become. **We want all carers to be hyper-vigilant but not panic about ringworm.** Always be on the lookout for ringworm, and if you suspect it please make sure your foster is confined to an easily cleanable area such as a laundry or bathroom.

If you catch ringworm: Humans can definitely catch ringworm – people with compromised immune systems are most susceptible. If you or a member of your family think they have ringworm, please consult your physician and clear your own personal infection before fostering another litter.

If your foster has been diagnosed ringworm: Daily cleaning will minimize the amount of environmental contamination that builds up while affected cats are housed in your home and undergoing treatment. This will be much easier if the infected animals are limited to a small area of the house that has minimal furniture and no carpeting (e.g. a large dog crate, bathroom). This is particularly critical until the first four weeks of effective topical treatment have been completed, and ideally the infected animal(s) should stay in isolation until the vet has cleared them. A thorough cleaning will also be needed after the affected cats have left the isolation area. Successful ringworm treatment involves concurrent use of systemic and topical therapy, reasonable confinement to easily cleaned areas, and decontamination of the environment.

Cleaning the home environment in the event of a ringworm infection:

- All non-porous surfaces should be “hard cleaned” prior to disinfecting. This refers to the mechanical removal of all hair and debris via vacuuming, sweeping (Swiffers recommended over brooms) and mechanical washing of the surfaces with detergent and water. It is important to thoroughly rinse surfaces as some detergent residue can inactivate disinfecting agents.
- Once hard cleaning has been accomplished a disinfectant cleaner should be applied to all non-porous surfaces. Over-the-counter cleaners that publicize that it is effective against *T. mentragrophytes* can be used if applied liberally to the surface and allowed to remain wet for a 10 minute contact time. Household bleach can also be used at a 1:10 dilution and also must have a 10 minute contact time before wiping away.
- Wood floors can be successfully decontaminated by daily removal of hair and dust by Swiffers and floors are mopped using commercial wood oil soap.
- Rugs and couches should be vacuumed once thoroughly after infected cat has been contained. Vacuum cleaners with bags should have the bags discarded right after vacuuming. Vacuums with canisters should have contents dumped in a plastic or paper bag and discarded in the trash right away. Always wear gloves when handling the contents of the vacuum cleaner.

Cleaning of the isolation space while the animal is under treatment

- As long as your animal is receiving treatment and is reasonably confined, twice weekly hard cleaning followed by a disinfectant is sufficient.
- Twice weekly decontamination is strongly recommended.
- Between hard cleanings it is important to mechanically remove all hair and debris, a good way to do this is by using a one-step cleaner (such as Clorox wipes or Acell wipes) on surfaces in the isolation room daily.
- It is a good idea to have a set of “isolation clothes” to use when you visit with your animal, so you avoid bringing any spores outside of the isolation area while the animal is under treatment. It is recommended that the clothes are changed weekly and are added to other contaminated items when washing (instead of the general laundry). Washing your clothes in Canesten rinse is highly recommended as it is less harsh on your clothes than bleach.

After affected cats have been cleared, it is ok to release them from their isolation space. It is suggested that you give the house one final good hard clean and disinfection before the cats are released and then close off their isolation space until that is thoroughly hard cleaned and disinfected. If the cat was kept reasonably confined to a cleanable area and effectively treated from the outside, basic cleaning may be adequate. Some steps to consider include those below.

- All exposed bedding and toys should be laundered separately from the non-contaminated laundry. Anything that cannot be laundered or disinfected with bleach should be tossed. When in doubt, throw it out.
- All non-porous surfaces should be thoroughly hard cleaned and then disinfected. This should be repeated at least twice before the room can be opened again.
- Clothing that was worn when in contact with the cats should be washed with the contaminated bedding, separate from the general laundry.
- After all contaminated laundry has been washed and dried the washer and dryer should be cleaned with a disinfectant and the washer should run once empty, with water only to rinse the disinfectant. The dryer lint trap should also be decontaminated by washing in an all-purpose house hold detergent.

A recent diagnosis of ringworm can be daunting, but once you get started, it seems to be over before you know it. The main thing to remember is to clean, clean, rinse then clean and rinse again. Thank you for managing the treatment ringworm in your home; it will be a challenging next few weeks, but it will be a shorter treatment if you follow the suggested guidelines above.

Please contact your veterinarian if you have any questions in regard to treatment or decontamination of your home.