

RINGWORM

By Karen L. Radano, DVM

Dexter, a 4 month old domestic shorthair cat, presented to the hospital for evaluation of scabs on his body. He had several areas of alopecia, missing hair and crusting. Bacterial and fungal skin infections can both present with this history.

Dexter also had an upper respiratory infection. A course of antibiotics was started. A fungal culture of the skin was taken to rule out fungal infection. Although Dexter's upper respiratory infection improved, his skin lesions persisted despite antibiotics.

His fungal culture turned out to be positive for dermatophytosis, commonly known as ringworm. Dexter began treatment with an oral antifungal medication called itraconazole and his lesions quickly began to resolve.

Despite common misconception, ringworm does not actually involve a worm at all. Ringworm, or dermatophytosis, is a fungal infection of the skin. Ringworm lesions are often small, round, ring like lesions with no hair and redness, scaling or crusting around the outer edges. Lesions are not usually itchy and commonly found around the face and ears. The appearance and location of lesions, however, can vary greatly. Rarely, cats can be asymptomatic carriers with no clinical signs, but can still shed spores into the environment. Some species of ringworm that affect cats and dogs are also zoonotic, meaning they can be transmitted to humans from an infected animal.



This is an example of ringworm lesions in a cat.

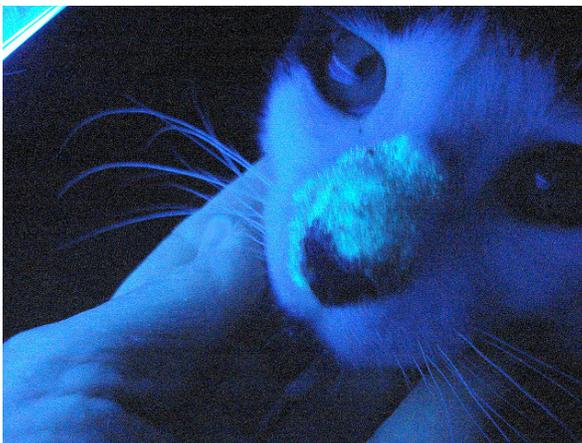


This is an example of a human ringworm lesion.

If you are concerned your pet may have ringworm, please call your veterinarian. Your pet's doctor will perform a physical exam and if the lesions are suspicious, a fungal culture will be recommended. The lesions may also be examined with an ultraviolet light, but only a few species of ringworm actually will fluoresce. Other times, hairs are plucked from the animal and examined under the microscope, but this method is not always diagnostic. Therefore, the fungal culture is the most accurate method of diagnosis.



This is an example of a positive fungal culture



This is a positive ultraviolet light test, aka wood's lamp test.

Ringworm is usually a self-limiting disease which will resolve on its own with time. Despite this, treatment is often recommended to limit environmental

contamination and risks of spread to other pets and humans. The fungal spores shed into the environment can survive well over a year. Direct contact with these spores either on the infected pet or from the environment can result in infection, especially in immunosuppressed animals and people. If there is a single local lesion, it may respond to topical antifungal creams. Multiple lesions will likely need more extensive treatment involving either medicated shampoos or oral antifungal medications.

Treatment is often continued for over 1 month. Negative fungal cultures are used to determine when treatment can be discontinued. The environment also needs to be adequately disinfected by vacuuming, mopping, and cleaning with a 1:10 bleach and water solution.