

Tinea/Ring Worm

What kind of disease is Tinea or Ringworm?

Tinea is an infection of the skin caused by a fungus. Although the term "Ringworm" suggests a worm infection, it is not really so. This infection is caused by dermatophytes (a type of fungus) that lives on the skin of humans, animals, the environment including the soil. The fungus spreads by infiltrating the outer layer of the skin, leading to the development of the infection even in the hair and nails.

What are the symptoms of Tinea?

Tinea infection appears as red, scaly patches/plaques on the skin. These patches may gradually spread and form ring-like structures as the name implies. Most patients will get these lesions initially in moist areas due to sweat like in the axillae & groins. The infection can gradually spread to different parts of the body, depending on the location.

As the name implies Ringworm often appears as a circular rash with a raised, red edge, while the center of the patch may become lighter in colour, creating a characteristic appearance. It may also have a crusty or scaly texture. The edge of the lesion may appear raised or pustular and sometimes with small blister formation.

Depending on where the infection occurs, the appearance and symptoms may vary. For example, between the fingers, it can appear as white, thick, and scaly patches. Similarly, in areas like the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, white, scaly patches can develop. The lesions on the scalp may also show reddish, scaly patches or grey coloured patches which will lead to hair loss.

When the fungal infection occurs on the nails, it may appear as white clumps on the nail surface, and the nails may become discoloured and distorted. The nail may separate from the underlying nail bed and debris may accumulate underneath the nail plate.

Who is at risk of contracting the disease?

This condition can affect people of any age. However, scalp infection is more common among children.

The risk of contracting the disease increases under certain circumstances, such as:

- Weather conditions which lead to excessive sweating.
- Poor personal hygiene
- Use of tight, restrictive clothing
- Sharing personal items including clothes
- Participation in contact sports like rugby and football
- People with a weakened immune system
- Individuals with diabetes



Is Tinea a contagious disease?

Tinea is a contagious fungal infection, which is spread by touch. It can spread through direct contact of an infected person's skin or clothing, towels or headgear used by him/her. Additionally, it can spread through contact with contaminated surfaces like toilets seats, beds, or other shared furniture.

Can pets like dogs and cats transmit the disease?

Yes, pets like dogs and cats can carry fungal infections, and they can pass the infection to humans. Since the fungi can survive in the environment for a long time, there remains a risk of transmission even after some time has passed.

How to recognize the disease?

In most cases, experienced medical professionals in Dermatology can identify the infection through examination. However, sometimes, samples of scrapings, clippings, pluckings from skin, nail or hair respectively can be sent for examination under a microscope to identify the fungus.

Can Tinea be cured?

As Tinea is a fungal infection, it can be completely cured with proper antifungal medication if used for the right duration. Based on the spread of the infection, the physician will determine the type of antifungal medication and the duration of treatment required.

When applying creams, you should be cautious enough to apply it to the whole patch as well as one inch beyond the edge.

You should adhere to the treatment plan. The instructions given by the physician should be followed. Although you may see that the lesions have healed, you should take in to mind that stopping treatment early may cause the infection to return. In most cases, treatment should be continued at least for a month.

Don't use creams decided by your own or from a pharmacy. The medication should be always prescribed by the treating physician.

For the total cure of the disease it is important to check whether the family members are also affected and if so, proper treatment of them.

Are 'Steroids' helpful in the treatment of Tinea?

For any kind of Tinea, Steroids are not recommended. There are many products with steroids and anti-fungal combinations in the market. In most instances people tend to buy these products as a treatment for their itching which they think is the ideal treatment.



But usage of those products will lead to change in the appearance of lesions leading to misdiagnosis. In that instances patients may need expensive treatment for a longer duration.

How to prevent reappearance of the infection & the spread of the infection?

- Ensure that all family members and pets are checked for the infection by a Doctor/Veterinary surgeon and treated if necessary.
- Avoid sharing items like hats, towels, or clothing that may harbour the fungus.
- Proper cleaning of them are also necessary as the infection may linger.
- Avoid swimming pools, salons, and spas until the infection is completely cleared.
- Wash your clothes separately. If possible wash them with hot water. If it is not feasible dry them under sunlight and iron them which will lead to the destruction of the fungus.
- Do not wear tight clothing that may irritate the infected areas, and avoid using unclean bedding or towels.
- By following proper hygiene and medical guidance, you can manage and prevent the spread of Tinea effectively.

How to prevent Tinea infection?

- Maintain good personal hygiene and cleanliness.
- Avoid excessive moisture
- Avoid sharing personal items including clothing.
- Use loose, cotton underwear.
- Try to wear footwear which do not cover the feet completely.
- If pets show signs of infection, make sure they receive treatment. Avoid direct contact with them unnecessarily.

