

## Dermatophytosis AKA “Ringworm”

Adapted in part from the UW Madison Shelter Medicine Program online publication “Ringworm”

“Ringworm” is the common name given to some species of fungi that grow in the hair, nails, and skin surfaces of humans and animals. The name is confusing because it dates to a time when people believed the disease was caused by a worm. The scientific (and *slightly* more accurate) name for “ringworm” is dermatophytosis, which literally translates to “skin plant disease” in Greek.

The dermatophytes (skin fungi) that cause ringworm in cats and dogs can pass to other animals and to human beings. For this reason, dermatophyte-infected animals must be kept in quarantine in your home, given oral medications, and bathed with antifungal treatment regularly. It is also essential that you clean yourself, your clothes, and your home often and well, sanitize any space where the infected animal has been, treat your own animals prophylactically, and monitor the people and animals in your home for dermatophyte lesions (circular or patchy areas of redness, itching, and hair loss.)

### Dermatophytosis Treatment

#### Step 1: Quarantine

- Isolate foster cats
  - All foster cats in a group, whether related or not, are considered infected as long as any one of them is infected.
  - Choose an easily cleanable room, such as a bathroom, and eliminate difficult to wash textiles like drapes and large blankets. If possible, rooms with carpet should be avoided.
  - Provide all items that the cats need in their quarantine room including easily laundered blankets, beds, and toys for their comfort. Tip: Shipping boxes make excellent disposable toys.
  - **Visit foster cats regularly to play with and pet them. They still need your love and socialization!**
- Wear the following protective clothing to interact with the quarantined cats:
  - Long-sleeved shirts tucked into pants
  - Long pants tucked into socks
  - Plastic or cotton gloves (provided by FR) tucked into shirt
  - Bandana or close-fitting hat to cover hair
- Remove your protective clothing immediately after leaving the room.
  - Launder clothing daily or keep it tied up in a plastic bag until you can clean.
  - Turn plastic gloves inside out and discard after each use OR wear fabric garden gloves and launder them after each use.

#### Step 2: Treating Infected Cats

- Antifungal baths
  - Wear protective clothing that you don't mind having stained.
  - Use sulfurated lime or antifungal shampoo according to their **prescription** labels, not the manufacturer's bottle label.
  - An assistant is EXTREMELY helpful to have on hand for harder to bathe cats, multiple cats, drying cats, and moral support!.

- Baths are usually done twice weekly but may be reduced to once weekly if skin irritation develops.
  - i. Check paw pads for peeling and cracking that may be a sign that the shampoo is causing irritation.
  - ii. Wipe nursing moms' teats clean after topical treatment.
  - iii. If you accidentally get lime dip or shampoo into a cat's eye during bathing, rinse it immediately and thoroughly with artificial tears (provided by Feline Rescue.)
- If a hair dryer is not available to dry the cats, towel dry them thoroughly, then keep them warm on a heat pad, on a heating disc, or under a heat lamp while they air dry.
  - i. Cats who are air-dried must be prevented from licking sulfurated lime while it is wet. It can cause vomiting, poor appetite, and diarrhea if eaten while wet.
  - ii. Small e-collars can be made using a stapler and paper cups with the bottoms removed or paper plates with the middles cut out.
- Oral antifungal medication must be given according to the prescription instructions.
  - Many antifungal medications require a treatment period followed by a period without the medication to help prevent side effects in the cats being treated. Read prescription labels closely.
  - Some antifungal medications may require a dose adjustment at the start of each treatment period. If this is the case, a formula for calculating the new treatment dose will be provided on the treatment label. If you have questions about dosing, contact Veterinary Services.
- Testing for success
  - Testing visits are best done just before an oral medication cycle starts and just before a bath is due.
  - **Testing will start two weeks into treatment and continue weekly** until two negative culture results or a negative hair PCR test are obtained. At this point the cats are considered clear of fungus.
  - If testing appointments are not completed weekly it will take longer to declare the cats free from ringworm. This results in more work for you, their foster caregiver.
  - In general, infected cats are not available for adoption until their fungus is cleared.

### **Step 3: Prophylactic Treatment of Other Animals in your Home**

- Feline Rescue does not cover the cost of testing or treatment for a Foster Caregiver's own animals. In general, we recommend at least one round of antifungal baths for all other animals in the home because even animals without skin lesions can carry the fungus and infect others. However you must speak with your veterinarian to determine the most appropriate treatment for your pets.

### **Step 4: Removing Fungus from Your Home**

- Discard heavily exposed items such as scratching posts that cannot be easily washed or disinfected.
- Clean thoroughly
  - Clear cluttered surfaces and use an electrostatic cleaning product such as a Swiffer® to remove as much dust and hair as possible from every surface.
  - Launder bedding and other soft items in HOT water (at least 110 F.) If a steam disinfectant cycle is available on your machine, use it.
  - Wash all hard surfaces, then wet them with 1:16 Rescue solution (**blue-taped** spray bottle provided by FR) and let that sit for 5 minutes. Remove Rescue with a damp cloth after 5 minutes.

- Always check surfaces for colorfastness before use.
    - **You can try soaking items such as carpeting and furniture with Rescue to disinfect them. However, the item may be slow to dry, and stains or other damage may result.**
  - Vacuum carpeting, furniture, vents and vent covers, and any other items that are difficult to wash.
    - Discard the vacuum contents in an outdoor trash bin afterward, then vacuum heavily exposed surfaces again.
    - After emptying the trash bin or bag a second time, discard the bag and rinse or change all filters.
  - Furnace filters should be replaced, but duct cleaning is not necessary.
- **Clean the quarantine room and its contents in this manner every time an antifungal bath is given.**

Feline Rescue provides the following supplies for dermatophyte treatment:

- Additional blankets and towels upon request
- Antifungal dip or shampoo
- Disposable or cotton gloves
- Artificial tears solution
- Oral antifungal medication
- 1:16 Rescue disinfectant spray

Feline Rescue recommends that you have the following supplies on hand for dermatophyte treatment:

- A bandana or close-fitting hat
- Electrostatic dusting wipes
- Washcloths for cleaning and rinsing
- Long rubber gloves
- Old clothes that are ok to stain
- A large plastic tub for bathing cats in
- An empty gallon jug
- A hair dryer OR a source of warmth for kittens plus items to make small e-collars (paper plates, paper bowls, stapler)
- A willing helper for bathing, medicating, and general care of cats

**Most importantly, don't feel overwhelmed!**

- Treating dermatophytosis can be a chore, but it is a curable disease! Your effort, patience, and diligence will be the reason that your fosters recover, thrive, and find their forever homes.
- Ask Veterinary Services and other Foster Caregivers for advice. Veterinary Services has the expert answers you need, and Feline Rescue has a large network of Foster Caregivers, many of whom have gotten through dermatophytosis treatment. Ask for tips and tricks if you have difficulty along the way, but beware advice that contradicts the instructions in this handout or those given by Veterinary Services.
- Don't panic if you or someone in your household appears to contract dermatophytosis. Consult with your doctor to confirm the diagnosis and decide how best to treat it. Most cases are easily cured with over-the-counter creams. Also, if you follow the quarantine and disinfection instructions above, your chances of catching dermatophytosis are low.