

Ringworm Infection in Horses

What is ringworm?

Ringworm, or dermatophytosis, is a fungal infection of the skin and hair shafts. It causes lesions with loss of hair, crusting of skin, and sometime raised nodules that are often a characteristic circular shape but appearance can vary greatly. The condition can be itchy but is often not. We often diagnose ringworm by its appearance, but sometimes in questionable cases a sample is taken from the lesion and laboratory tests to confirm it are done in our lab at the surgery. Ringworm occurs where the skin is slightly damaged and fungal spores can enter it. The spores can survive in the environment for a long time (sometimes years!) and lives particularly on tack and kit, on walls, buckets, trailers or lorries, and in bedding.

Treatment of ringworm on the individual horse

Treatment aims to clear infection on the treated horse as well as reducing spore formation to stop environmental contamination. A topical wash treatment, Imaverol, is often used. In non-responsive or severe cases, an oral treatment can be given.

Although most fungal infections in horses are self-limiting, treatment will limit the spread of infection. Ringworm affects people, so gloves and protective clothing should be worn by those handling horses with active infection or those with early suspicious lesions which have not yet been diagnosed.

Management of ringworm

Horses with suspected or confirmed ringworm should be treated as highly contagious to both people and other horses. Isolation and hygiene procedures are therefore extremely important and help to limit the spread of infection.

Hygiene and isolation protocol:

- All tack, rugs and grooming equipment must be restricted to individual horses and sterilised regularly by washing in a fungicidal or sporicidal disinfectant (Virkon or Trigen).
- Stables, floors, trailers/lorries, and fences should be washed with Virkon as per the manufacturer's instructions to reduce environmental fungal spores.
- Use disinfectant foot dips outside affected horse's stables.
- Affected horses should be moved as far away as possible from other horses to prevent contact.
- Bedding from the stables of affected horses should be removed and burnt, plus any skin debris or hair removed from horses.
- Protective clothing should be worn when handling affected horses (eg boiler suit over normal clothing) and latex gloves must be worn. Wash hands washed after handling affected horses. Affected horses should be dealt with last followed by disinfection of boots and hands and removal of boiler suit can be an effective way to limit contact.
- Do not clip affected horses until the infection has resolved.