



Ringworm

Whenever this diagnosis is tentatively mentioned, panic waves ripple through livery yards. After reading this information sheet, you should be able to put the problem in perspective.

Ringworm is caused by a fungal infection of the superficial layer of the skin, hair and hooves. It is worth noting that worms are not involved with this infection. Several different yeasts are involved, most commonly *Trichophyton equinum* and *T. mentagrophytes*, but also *T. verrucosum*, *Microsporum gypsum* and *M. Canis*. Most important, it is a zoonosis, which means it can be transmitted to humans. Sometimes the infection can lead to permanent scarring in spite of the infection being controlled.

Ringworm is a zoonosis, meaning it can be transmitted to humans

Transmission of the fungi is by direct contact between animals or by contact with infected hair and crust on tack, people, grooming equipment, horse boxes or fences. The fungi needs an entrance to infect, such as a wound, and can be involved with pastern dermatitis. Fungal spores can remain infectious for more than 12 months!!

It takes between 4 to 30 days to show signs of disease after contact with the yeast, but there are some horses which are symptomless carriers of the fungi. Young horses under 4 years of age are especially susceptible, apparently because of their lack of immunity. Adult horses are less

likely to become infected and, if infected, recover faster than young horses.

Typical ringworm is characterized by circular, bald patches with crusts and broken hair. The horse is sometimes itchy but this depends on the type of ringworm. The nose, head, neck and girth area are most commonly affected, only occasionally will it spread throughout the whole body. Because of the many different organisms causing ringworm a diagnosis is confirmed by culture from and microscopic examination of skin scrapes and hairplucks. As soon as you suspect this condition, it is wise to call us for confirmation and treatment.

Brushes, tack and stable must be cleaned and disinfected

The disease is self-limiting and will resolve spontaneously in 4 week to 6 months, unless the animal is immunosuppressed. Immunity to ringworm is long-lived, but a horse can be re-infected with a different type of ringworm. Treatment consists of topical and/or oral antifungal preparations. However, environmental decontamination is as important as treating the horse, because of the viability of fungal spores in the environment and to prevent spread of the problem to other horses and people. Brushes, tack and stable must be cleaned and disinfected, and the bedding destroyed.

How can we prevent ringworm and control an outbreak?

- Avoid overcrowding and maintain a good plane of nutrition and health
- Isolate and treat infected horses at the onset of clinical signs
- Treat suspected horses early so that they can not pass the infection to others
- Disinfect tack, brushes and stables
- Do not use grooming equipment and tack from infected horses on healthy horses
- Handle infected horses last, since people can carry infected hairs/skin on the hands
- A vaccine is available for cattle in the UK, none for horses

Remember this:

- Ringworm is also highly contagious to people - a zoonosis!
- It is ultimately a self-limiting disease, but may take 4 weeks to 6 months to clear completely
- Horses with ringworm should not attend shows or competitions
- Fungal spores survive more than one year in the environment, thus disinfection of environment is as important as treating your horse
- It is caused by a fungal infection and not a worm
- Be careful when blaming an outbreak on a new arrival, it might have become infected on YOUR yard!