



Issue: Dermatophytosis (Ringworm)

What is dermatophytosis?

Dermatophytosis is an infection of the hair and skin by a group of fungi called dermatophytes. There are several different fungi in this group - the most common ones are *Microsporum canis*, *Microsporum gypseum* and *Trichophyton mentagrophytes*. The infection is typically spread by touching an infected animal (or by touching an item that has touched an infected animal).

Can I get dermatophytosis from my pet?

Yes! Dermatophytosis is particularly common in cats, but it can also occur in humans, dogs and other mammals. If your pet has dermatophytosis, do not snuggle or cuddle with your pet until the infection is treated. Wear long sleeves and pants around your pet, and wash your hands and your clothing after handling your pet. It may be simplest to confine your pet to a small, easily-cleanable space like a bathroom, during the treatment period.

How is dermatophytosis diagnosed?

There are several different methods to test for dermatophytosis. The simplest one is a Wood's lamp, or a UV lamp with a very specific set of wavelengths. A Wood's lamp exam is not foolproof, so we typically will perform more definitive tests on fur samples, including a DTM culture or a PCR test. A DTM culture involves putting the fur onto a culture plate, and watching it for 21 days to see if anything will grow. A PCR test is a type of molecular test that looks for dermatophyte genes. This test only takes a few days, unlike a DTM culture, but it is less specific for an active infection.

How is dermatophytosis treated?

Dermatophytosis is best treated with a three-pronged approach - topical treatment, oral treatment and environmental treatment.

The most common topical agent is lime sulfur, a very smelly mixture that is sprayed or shampooed on an animal and then left to dry - NOT washed off. Lime sulfur baths are typically done twice weekly until the infection resolves. Be sure your pet stays warm while the mixture is drying on the fur - you can use a hair dryer to speed this process.

The oral antifungal medicine that we use at ACC is Itrafungol (itraconazole). This is a liquid medicine that is given once daily. It can be given daily for several weeks, or given in a pattern of one week on, one week off. Both are documented to be effective. Your vet will give you specific instructions.

Environmental treatment consists of thorough disinfection or decontamination of the living quarters for the infected pet. A good mantra is to "clean as thoroughly as if you were cleaning up vomit or feces." You should wash your pet's bedding daily, and vacuum or Swiffer your floors regularly. You can use spray cleaners such as Rescue or diluted bleach on floors as well. Be sure to wait the prescribed amount of time before wiping the cleaner away. For couches and other fabric surfaces that cannot be disinfected or washed, lint rollers and vacuuming should be sufficient.

In some species like humans, you can get away with just a topical treatment like miconazole cream. However, this is insufficient for cats because they can have subclinical infections in areas that you did not treat. So you MUST treat affected cats from all three angles.

How long does it take to treat? How do we know if it's cured?

Treatment can take 5-10 weeks. Traditionally, a cure is defined as two consecutive negative DTM cultures, started 1-3 weeks apart. Because DTM cultures take so long to grow, it's best to start running new cultures after every week of treatment. Two negative PCR tests may be done instead, depending on your veterinarian's preference.

Open Door Policy

When the cats are displaying confident behaviors and you think they're ready for the final step, you can gradually open the safe room door. Keep the screen door or baby gate up to act as a fail-safe if one cat decides to make a charge for it. Continue to monitor both cats and keep treats on hand to reward positive behaviors (sniffing, rubbing or soliciting play). Even behaviors like breaking a stare or walking by without growling is positive! If they look at each other and give no concerning reactions, give each cat a treat. If the cats stare at each other and appear tense, give them something to do to distract them. Offer play sessions using an interactive toy (fishing pole or wand toys) in each other's presence. Enlist in help so each cat has a toy to play with and don't have to compete. When you feel confident both cats will be fine without the barrier, remove it! Keep a towel or large piece of cardboard on hand to block their view of each other and help separate them if things go south (growling, hissing, charging, swiping/biting).



A Look at the Environment

As the cats spend more time together and start sharing spaces in the home, continue to monitor their behaviors and reward them for behaviors you'd like to see more. It's important to provide plenty of vertical territory to help them feel secure; cat trees, walkways, perches, tunnels, and hideaways will do wonders to increase space in your cats' eyes and help them feel safe in your home. We recommend spreading out their feeding stations, litter boxes, scratching posts, and toys in different areas in the home. This will give the cats more options to access precious resources thus, reducing conflicts to help them coexist peacefully in the home.

For information on how to introduce cats to dogs, please see our "Introducing Cat to Dog" flyer.

Other Resources:

The Science Behind Feline Pheromones: <https://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com/pheromone-science/>

How to Introduce Cats by Jackson Galaxy: <https://youtu.be/tsYT7yIOdqQ>