

Fungal infections of the skin or nails (ringworm, tinea, athlete's foot)

Description

Tinea is a fungal infection of the skin, including the scalp. It causes a rash that is usually called 'ringworm' if it is on the head or body, 'athlete's foot' if it is between the toes or on the feet, or 'jock itch' if it is in the groin.

Fungi can infect the scalp, skin and nails. The condition looks different depending on where it is located.

Skin

Fungal infections on most areas of skin appear as a flat, spreading, ring-shaped area. The outer edge is usually reddish. The area often contains fluid, including pus, but may be dry and scaly, or moist and crusted. The centre of the patch may appear to be healing.

Scalp and beard

On the scalp and beard, fungal infections may begin as a small pimple that spreads outward, leaving scaly patches of temporary baldness. Infected hairs become brittle and break off easily.

Feet

The characteristics of fungal infections on the feet are scaling or cracking of the skin, especially between the toes, or blisters containing a thin, watery fluid.

Toenails and fingernails

Fungal diseases of the nails are difficult to treat and tend to be a long-term problem. Nails on the hands or feet gradually thicken, discolour and become brittle. Cheesy-looking material forms beneath the nail, or the nail becomes chalky and disintegrates.

How does it spread?

The germ spreads by direct skin contact or by touching contaminated clothing or other articles, infected animals or contaminated soil.

Incubation period

The incubation period varies with the site of infection.

Infectious period

As long as the condition persists, it can be passed from person to person.

Exclusion period

Children with fungal infections of the skin, scalp or nails should be excluded until the day after appropriate treatment has been begun.

Responsibilities of educators and other staff

- Advise the parent to keep the child home until the day after appropriate treatment has begun.
- If an educator or other staff member is infected, they should stay home until the day after appropriate treatment has begun.
- Make sure staff and children practise effective hand hygiene.
- Ensure that appropriate cleaning practices are being followed in the education and care service.

Responsibilities of parents

- Keep the child home until the day after appropriate treatment has begun.
- Inspect other people in the family for signs of infection.
- Encourage effective hand hygiene at home.

Controlling the spread of infection

- Seek appropriate treatment early.
- Practise effective hand hygiene.
- Avoid sharing clothes or other personal items that have been in contact with an infected person.
- If pets have ringworm or mange, have them treated by a veterinarian.

Treatment

The condition must be diagnosed correctly—seek medical advice. Fungal infections are very difficult to treat and may take a long time (months or years) to disappear. They are treated by applying antifungal ointment to the affected area, or taking antifungal medications.