

RINGWORM

1. General

- a. The name ringworm is not accurate because it is not a worm but a fungus that became known for its pattern, which resembles a worm in a circular shape. It is a very hardy fungus that can live for up to a year in soil and on objects such as fence railings and timber structures, and can remain on the skin for up to three weeks before clinical signs develop. The disease can therefore be spread before there are signs of infection.
- b. Ringworm is transmitted by direct contact between ponies, tack, grooming equipment, clothing, contact with infested stables or trailers. It is highly contagious and whole groups of ponies can become affected in an outbreak. Younger ponies are more likely to be affected, although very old or debilitated ponies are also susceptible. In some cases it can be transmitted to humans.
- c. Any outbreak of ringworm shall be notified to the HPA.

2. Clinical Symptoms. Ringworm is often confused with rain scald, as the hair loss patterns resemble circular patches that are common with both.

- The skin lesions usually start as small raised spots from which the hair is lost. These usually become scurfy or a thick dry crumbly scab may form. Hair surrounding the infected area, or during loss, often appears raised, or rough. There may only be a couple of lesions but if left untreated the condition can become extensive.
- Ponies may rub or scratch because of the itching sensation surrounding infected areas.
- Along with hair loss there are usually raised skin rashes that are red and can look like a red worm under the skin.

3. Steps to Reduce The Risk of Infection.

- a. Where possible, new ponies should be kept in isolation for 2-3 weeks and closely monitored for signs of any infectious disease including ringworm.
- b. The most common method of spread is on tack such as bridles, boots, girths and grooming equipment so each pony should have its own tack, grooming kit, rugs etc.

4. What to do if Ringworm is Suspected?

- a. Notify the HPA.
- b. Ensure that the affected pony has its own grooming kit, rugs, tack, etc, which should not be used on other ponies and should be disinfected or disposed of after treatment has ceased. Handlers should use gloves when dealing with affected ponies and, where possible, these should be dealt with last.
- c. Commence treatment immediately. If left untreated, some ringworm cases 'self cure' in 6-15 weeks but this risks infection of other ponies and in most cases is too long a time to wait. There are two main forms of treatment.
 - (i) Most commonly, treatment is by washing or rinsing the affected areas with specific anti-fungal solutions. There are several available but no one product will successfully cure all cases and it may be necessary to try two or more different treatments before one is successful. Most of these solutions are applied on two or more separate occasions over a week or more. It is important that all scabs, scurfy skin and debris are removed before treatment is applied or the fungi will be protected from the effects of the medication. This can be achieved by washing the area with a mild

detergent and gently using a nylon scouring pad or toothbrush to carefully lift the scabs and debris. If the skin is raw, extensive scab removal may need to be delayed until after the first few treatments. Rinse the skin well and allow to dry as any water on the coat will dilute the solutions further. At the end of a course of treatment, the lesions should have stopped spreading, no new lesions should appear and the skin should look healthy if bare. New hair grows quite quickly.

- (ii) In severe, generalised cases or where there is an outbreak in a group of ponies, treatment with powders, (griseofulvin), given in the feed for 10-14 days can be used. These take up to six weeks to be effective and should be used in conjunction with topical (skin surface) treatments as described above.

5. Tests for Ringworm

- a. A skin scraping of skin cells, debris and hair confirms the diagnosis.
- b. This material is examined under a microscope and the ringworm spores, which are found in damaged hair shafts, can be identified by their typical appearance.
- c. The fungus can be grown in the laboratory to identify the species involved, which sometimes helps with treatment. This is done in the same way that bacteria are cultured in an incubator.
- d. Unlike most bacteria which grow very rapidly, fungi take several weeks to grow and in many cases the pony has been successfully treated before the results of the culture are known.