



## Demystifying Ringworm

What is ringworm? It can sound a little scary if you aren't familiar with it. But chances are you have had some contact with ringworm in your life, even if you don't know it! Even though the name suggests it, ringworm isn't a worm at all! It is actually a common fungus that can be found in most environments. So if ringworm is so prolific, why hasn't everyone gotten it? The reason that most people (and animals) haven't gotten ringworm is because they have a strong immune system and even if they do have contact with ringworm, they simply aren't affected by it.

However, a shelter environment creates a different situation... The animals that AHS receives often arrive ill, very young, or are simply frightened or stressed. All of these things can lead to a lowered immune system making them more susceptible to break with a ringworm infection if they have been exposed. Unfortunately, once these animals show signs of ringworm, which is often characterized by small, circular patches of flakey hair loss, AHS must isolate them from the rest of the population immediately to avoid exposure to our other animals. Treatment, in the form of twice-weekly lime sulfur baths, is also started to kill the existing fungus as well as prevent any additional spots from appearing. While this process is extremely safe and effective, AHS struggles with having the space to properly quarantine these animals and the manpower needed to provide their twice-weekly treatments.

Ideally, affected animals, usually kittens, would be placed in an AHS foster home while they are being treated. This of course requires willing foster families and that is where YOU come in!! Fostering ringworm kittens may seem like a daunting task as first, but AHS supplies you with everything you will need, including step-by-step instructions on how to minimize exposure to your house, your family and your personal animals, how to administer the lime sulfur baths at home, and how to clean your house effectively once your kittens are cleared and are ready to return to the shelter for adoption. If you do decide to foster ringworm kittens for AHS, you will still be able to foster other non-infected animals later after appropriately cleaning.

Finally, some people may be concerned about their family or their own pets getting ringworm. There is, of course, always a possibility of this happening, but the risk is low if you pay attention to hand washing, cleaning, etc. If you did end up with a spot of ringworm, it is easily treated with an over-the-counter fungicidal cream such as Lamisil. We do, however, recommend that if you have very young or immune-compromised people or animals living in your house, you do not foster ringworm affected animals for AHS (we can always find you something different to foster!).

- Lisa Johns, COO