

Tinea (Ringworm, Jock Itch, Athlete's Foot)

For active kids, locker-room showers and heaps of sweaty clothes are part of their everyday lives — and so is the risk of getting fungal skin infections.

Jock itch, athlete's foot, and ringworm are all types of fungal skin infections known collectively as tinea. They're caused by fungi called dermatophytes that live on skin, hair, and nails and thrive in warm, moist areas.

Symptoms of these infections can vary depending on where they appear on the body. The source of the fungus might be soil, an animal (usually a cat, dog, or rodent), or in most cases, another person. Minor skin injuries (such as scratches) and too much exposure to heat and humidity make a person more likely to get a skin infection.

It's important to teach kids how to avoid fungal skin infections, which can be itchy and uncomfortable. If they do get one, most can be treated with over-the-counter medication, though some might require treatment by a doctor.

Ringworm

Ringworm isn't a worm, but a fungal infection of the scalp or skin that got its name from the ring or series of rings that it can produce.

Symptoms of Ringworm

Ringworm of the scalp may start as a small sore that resembles a pimple before becoming patchy, flaky, or scaly. These flakes may look like dandruff. It can cause some hair to fall out or break into stubbles. It can also cause the scalp to become swollen, tender, and red.

Sometimes, there may be a swollen, inflamed mass known as a kerion, which oozes fluid. This can be confused with impetigo or cellulitis. When the scalp has this infection, it can sometimes also cause swollen lymph glands at the back of the head.

Ringworm of the skin makes the skin itchy and red and creates a round patchy rash that has raised borders and a clear center.

Ringworm of the nails may affect one or more nails on the hands or feet. The nails may become thick, white or yellowish, and brittle.

If you suspect that your child has ringworm, call your doctor.

Treating Ringworm

Ringworm is fairly easy to diagnose and treat. Most of the time, the doctor can diagnose it by looking at it or by scraping off a small sample of the flaky infected skin to test for the fungus. The doctor may recommend an antifungal ointment for ringworm of the skin. For ringworm of the scalp or nails, where the infection is usually deeper in the skin, the doctor may prescribe a syrup or pill to take by mouth. Whatever treatment is chosen, your child should take the medicine as long as it is prescribed, even if the rash seems to be getting better. If not, the ringworm can come back.

An antifungal shampoo prescribed by the doctor also can help prevent the spread of the fungal spores. If your child was sent home from school for ringworm, he or she should be able to attend school again after starting treatment.

Preventing Ringworm

Ringworm usually spreads from fallen hair or skin cells, so it's important to encourage kids to avoid sharing combs, brushes, pillows, and hats with others. Sometimes, ringworm can be spread from tools at the barber or from furniture or shared towels.

Jock Itch

Jock itch, an infection of the groin and upper thighs, got its name because cases are commonly seen in active kids who sweat a lot while playing sports. But the fungus that causes the jock itch infection can thrive on the skin of any kids who spend time in hot and humid weather, wear tight clothing like bathing suits that cause friction, share towels and clothing, and don't completely dry off their skin. It can last for weeks or months if it goes untreated.

Symptoms of Jock Itch

Symptoms of jock itch may include:

- itching, chafing, or burning in the groin, thigh, or anal area
- skin redness in the groin, thigh, or anal area
- flaking, peeling, or cracking skin

Treating Jock Itch

Jock itch can usually be treated with over-the-counter antifungal creams and sprays. When using one of these, kids should:

- Wash and then dry the area with a clean towel.
- Apply the antifungal cream, powder, or spray as directed on the label.
- Change clothing, especially the underwear, every day.
- Continue this treatment for 2 weeks, even if symptoms disappear, to prevent the infection from recurring.

If the ointment or spray is not effective, call your doctor, who can prescribe other treatment.

Preventing Jock Itch

Jock itch can be prevented by keeping the groin area clean and dry, particularly after showering, swimming, and sweaty activities.

Athlete's Foot

Athlete's foot typically affects the soles of the feet, the areas between the toes, and sometimes the toenails. It can also spread to the palms of the hands, the groin, or the underarms if your child touches the affected foot and then touches another body part. It got its name because it affects people whose feet tend to be damp and sweaty, which is often the case with athletes.

Symptoms of Athlete's Foot

The symptoms of athlete's foot may include itching, burning, redness, and stinging on the soles of the feet. The skin may flake, peel, blister, or crack.



Treating Athlete's Foot

A doctor can often diagnose athlete's foot simply by examining the foot or by taking a small scraping of the affected skin to see if it has the fungus that causes athlete's foot.

Over-the-counter antifungal creams and sprays may effectively treat mild cases of athlete's foot within a few weeks. Athlete's foot can recur or be more serious. If that's the case, ask your doctor about trying a stronger treatment.

Preventing Athlete's Foot

Because the fungus that causes athlete's foot thrives in warm, moist areas, you can prevent infections by keeping feet and the space between the toes clean and dry.

Athlete's foot is contagious and can be spread in damp areas, such as public showers or pool areas, so it's wise to take extra precautions. Encourage kids to:

- wear waterproof shoes or flip-flops in public showers, like those in locker rooms

- alternate shoes or sneakers to prevent moisture buildup and fungus growth
- avoid socks that trap moisture or make the feet sweat, and instead choose cotton or wool socks or socks made of fabric that wicks away the moisture
- choose sneakers that are well ventilated with small holes to keep the feet dry

By taking the proper precautions and teaching them to your kids, you can prevent these uncomfortable skin infections from putting a crimp in your family's lifestyle.

Reviewed by: Rupal Christine Gupta, MD

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