
Tinea

Summary

- Tinea is a highly contagious fungal infection of the skin.
 - Fungi thrive in hot, moist areas. Common infection sites are the feet and groin.
 - Good hygiene can prevent recurring attacks of tinea.
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Tinea is a contagious fungal skin infection. The most commonly affected areas include the feet, groin, scalp and beneath the breasts. Tinea can be spread by skin-to-skin contact or indirectly through towels, clothes or floors. Tinea is also known as ringworm, which is a misleading name as no worm is involved.

All fungi need warm, moist environments and tinea is no exception. This is why the hottest, most sweat-prone areas of the body are the most likely areas for a tinea infection to occur. Communal showers and locker rooms are typical places where infection may be spread.

Treatment includes antifungal medication, antiperspirants and good hygiene.

Types of tinea

Tinea infections are known by specific names, depending on the part of the body that is affected. The most common types of tinea include:

- **Athlete's foot** – tinea of the foot, known as tinea pedis
- **Jock itch** – tinea of the groin, known as tinea cruris
- **Ringworm of the scalp** – tinea of the head, known as tinea capitis (mainly affects children)
- **Ringworm of the body** – tinea of the body, known as tinea corporis
- **Nail infection (onychomycosis)** – tinea of the toe or finger nails, known as tinea unguium.

Symptoms of tinea

The symptoms can include:

- Itching and stinging
- Red scaly rash that is shaped like a ring (annular)
- Cracking, splitting and peeling in the toe web spaces
- Blisters
- Yellow or white discoloration of the nails
- Bald spots on the scalp.

How to avoid tinea infection

Overheating and perspiration contribute to tinea infections. Suggestions to avoid tinea infection include:

- After washing, dry the skin thoroughly, particularly between the toes and within skin folds.
- Expose the skin to the air as much as possible.
- Wear cotton socks instead of synthetics.
- Use antiperspirants to control excessive perspiration (sweating).
- Wear thongs to swimming pools, locker rooms, gyms and other communal areas.

Treating a tinea infection

Tinea infections respond well to antifungal creams. Some infections are harder to shift and might also require an

antifungal medication in the form of a tablet.

Preventing the spread of tinea

It is important to remember that tinea is contagious. Suggestions on how to prevent the spread of infection to others include:

- Treat tinea infections with antifungal cream.
- Wash your hands after touching infected areas.
- Do not share towels.
- Do not walk around barefoot if you have tinea pedis (tinea of the feet).
- Clean the shower, bath and bathroom floor after use.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your pharmacist
- Dermatologist
- **Australasian College of Dermatologists** Tel. 1300 361 821
- **Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit**, Department of Health Victoria Tel. 1300 651 160.

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