What is ringworm?
Ringworm (dermatophytosis) is a fungal disease of cats, dogs, sheep, rabbits, cattle, and horses in that it invades keratinized structures (e.g. hair, horn, nails, feathers, and skin). It is a self-limiting condition (will clear without treatment) but it may take several months. When diagnosed, ringworm should be treated because the fungus can be transmitted to humans. In other words, it is a zoonotic disease.

How is ringworm transmitted?
Ringworm is transmitted by direct contact with infected animals, fomite (e.g.: bedding), or contaminated environment. Fungal spores can persist in the environment for years.

What does ringworm look like?
The classic lesion is a circular patch characterized by broken stubby hair, scaling or crusting, and redness. The lesion will appear to be spreading outward, often with a central area of healing. Animals may have just one lesion or many.

Does ringworm cause itching?
Ringworm usually does not cause itching (i.e., animals won't scratch at the affected area).

How is ringworm diagnosed?
Diagnosis is usually made by direct examination of hairs from the site of lesion. The hairs are examined under the microscope for characteristic spores lining the outside of the hair shaft. If direct examination fails to give a definitive diagnosis of ringworm, a fungal culture should be done. Fungal culture is the most reliable diagnostic test for ringworm. However, it may take up to three weeks before any growth is seen.

Why should ringworm be treated?
• Because it is a zoonotic disease (i.e. transmissible to humans)
• To reduce the spread to other animals
• To decrease environmental contamination
• To hasten the recovery from infection

How is ringworm treated in animals?
Single lesions (mild infection) can be spot treated with topical antifungal creams. Oral medications are available for more severe infections.

Can ringworm be prevented?
Ringworm spreads easily, so the best prevention is to treat infected animals and keep infected animals away from others until the infection has cleared.

Additional Information:
• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated 2005.