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## **SCALP FUNGUS INFECTION (RINGWORM, TINEA CAPITIS)**

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### **What causes scalp ringworm?**

Scalp ringworm (also called tinea capitis) is an infection of the skin and hair caused by a fungus. Although fungus infections on the skin often look like an enlarging “ring,” this condition is not caused by “worms.” The fungus is spread either by direct contact with another person who has the infection or from sharing objects that touch the hair such as combs, brushes, hats, rubber bands, barrettes, etc. Occasionally, the infection is caught from a dog or cat.

### **What does scalp ringworm look like?**

- The infection may occur in a few different forms. Most of the time it looks like dandruff, with white flakes of dry skin on the scalp. Sometimes there are bald spots or areas of broken hairs that look like black dots. The condition often itches; occasionally there is a funny odor to the scalp. Lymph glands in the back of the neck usually become slightly swollen.
- Less commonly the fungus causes scabs or pus-filled bumps on the scalp. Rarely, large, red, tender, swollen and oozing bald areas called a kerion can develop.
- The fungus that causes the infection on the scalp can also appear on other areas of the skin.
- Without proper treatment, the infection may last for several years.

### **How is it treated?**

Unlike fungus infections on the skin, scalp fungus infections must be treated with a prescription medicine that is taken by mouth. This is because the infection goes down into the hair roots where anti-fungal creams cannot reach.

Griseofulvin is the medicine most often prescribed for the treatment of scalp ringworm. It comes as a liquid or pill and should be taken once or twice a day, as directed. If your child cannot swallow the pills, they may be crushed with the back of a spoon and mixed into jelly, honey, ice cream, or other foods. Griseofulvin works best if it is taken with whole milk, cheese, ice cream or other fatty foods. It must be taken for at least 4 weeks and sometimes longer to cure the infection.

Occasionally a skin rash develops a couple days after starting the medication. Check with your doctor or nurse practitioner because it may be a normal reaction to the fungus and not an allergic reaction to the medicine.

The Permanente Medical Group, Inc.  
DEPARTMENT OF DERMATOLOGY  
*San Francisco*

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### **Is it contagious?**

Yes. Because sharing combs, brushes, towels, and other objects that touch the head spreads scalp fungus infections no one should share these kinds of items when someone in the home has the infection. The child with scalp ringworm should use a medicated such as Selsun Blue or Nizoral AD (both are available over-the-counter) at least twice a week; this may prevent the spread of the fungus infection.

If anyone else in the family or close contacts has developed a bad case of “dandruff,” they should be check by their doctor because they may have the infection and may be contagious. A veterinarian should examine any family pet with a skin problem.

### **Can a child with scalp ringworm go to school or day care?**

Once a child with scalp ringworm starts taking the medication they can return to school or day care. They should not share anything that touches their hair with the other kids. You might tell the school or day-care center about the scalp condition so they can watch for signs of the infection in other kids.

<p><b>Remember:</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cutting the hair short is not necessary or helpful in curing scalp fungus infections</li><li>• Continue the treatment until advised to stop</li></ul> |
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