

DESCRIPTION

A common, contagious fungal (tinea) infection of the skin on the feet. It often affects the soles and skin between toes (often the fourth and fifth toes). It usually affects teens and adults (rare in young children).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Dead skin between the toes.
- Itching in inflamed areas.
- Damp, musty foot odor.
- Moist, soft, gray-white or red scales on feet, especially between the toes.
- Small blisters on the feet (sometimes).

CAUSES

Infection by a Trichophyton fungus. The germs can be spread by direct contact with an infected person or by contact with the germs on shoes, socks, shower, or pool surfaces. Animals can also carry the germs and infect a human.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Infrequent washing of the feet.
- Infrequent changes of shoes or socks.
- Use of locker rooms and public showers.
- Hot, humid weather.
- People who have immune system problems due to illness or medications.
- Persistent moisture around the feet.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Bathe feet daily. Dry completely between the toes and apply drying or dusting powder.
- Wear rubber thongs or wooden sandals in public showers.
- Go barefoot when possible.
- Change socks daily and wear socks made of cotton, wool, or other natural, absorbent fibers. Avoid synthetics.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable within 3 weeks with treatment, but recurrence is common.

GENERAL MEASURES

- After soaking or bathing, carefully remove scales and material between the toes daily.
- Use a hair dryer to blow warm air on the feet to make sure they are completely dry.
- Keep affected areas cool and dry. Go barefoot or wear sandals during treatment. If socks are worn, keep them dry. If they get wet, change to dry ones.
- Cultures may be performed to rule out other skin disorders.

MEDICATIONS

- Use nonprescription antifungal powders, creams, or ointments (such as terbinafine) after each bath.
- For severe cases, you may be prescribed stronger topical or oral antifungal medications.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- Athlete's foot persists, despite self-treatment.
- You develop a fever or the infection seems to be spreading.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.