Ringworm Screening in the Shelter

Ringworm is one of the most devastating diseases that can enter an animal shelter, particularly for the feline population. A systematic and thorough screening process can prevent an outbreak and help keep the population happy and healthy!

1. **Evaluate the history.**
   
   *Does the animal come from the same home as known infected animals? Are the littermates or cagemates infected with ringworm?*

2. **Perform a physical examination.**
   
   *Thoroughly examine the skin under a bright light for any areas of hair loss, redness, broken hairs, excessive shedding, flakes and crusts. Pay close attention to the muzzle, lips, around the eyes, ears, toes and tail.*

3. **Examine the fur with a Wood’s lamp.**
   
   *Look for hairs to glow bright green at the follicle, at the base of the hair and along the shaft – not at the tip!*  

4. **Perform microscopic examination of fluorescing hairs.**
   
   *Glowing hairs can be plucked and examined under a microscope using 4X magnification. Infected hairs are wide and irregular. Occasionally fungal spores and hyphae can be seen.*

5. **Perform fungal cultures.**
   
   *Culture is the most accurate method of diagnosis and it allows you to determine the type of fungus causing the infection. Quantifying the severity of fungal growth on a culture can help direct management and treatment of the population.*

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**Using a Wood’s Lamp**

- A Wood’s lamp is a special ultraviolet light with a 365nm wavelength. It is NOT the same thing as a black light!
- Wood’s lamps that plug in (rather than operate on batteries) are generally more effective.
- The lamp must be turned on and allowed to warm up for 5 minutes prior to examination.
- The exam should be conducted in dark room for 3-5 minutes – it can take several minutes for glowing hairs to become visible.

**Performing a Toothbrush Culture**

- Using a new toothbrush, vigorously brush the animal’s entire body for 3-5 minutes.
- Brush any areas with skin lesions last, so as not to contaminate the rest of the coat.
- Starting in the center and working outward, gently push the toothbrush bristles into a fungal culture plate. Cover the entire surface of the culture plate.
- Label the bottom of the plate with the animal’s ID number and the date.

*Always wear gloves and discard the toothbrush after use!*

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