



Demodex Mange

Demodicosis, commonly called demodex mange, is the disease associated with an increased number in demodex mites on the body. Canine demodicosis is not contagious to people or other dogs.



Cats rarely get demodicosis, but when they do, their signs differ compared to dogs. The cat version is caused by a

different mite than the one in dogs and is contagious between cats but not to people.

Dogs

Demodex mites occur naturally on a dog's skin. Normally, they are in low numbers and do not cause any problems. However, when a dog has a poor immune system or an underlying disease, the body cannot keep the mite in check any longer and they will flourish.

Most dogs affected with demodicosis are young (3-6 months old). These dogs are believed to have an incomplete or weak immune system. Adult dogs can also be affected. These dogs tend to have an underlying disease that is suppressing the immune system.

Certain breeds are more likely to develop the demodex mange: pit bulls, Boston Terriers, Boxers, German Shepherds, Doberman Pinschers, English Bulldogs, Pugs, and Shar-peis. Although not contagious, it is believed the risk of developing demodicosis is hereditary. For this reason, don't breed dogs with demodicosis; instead spay or neuter them as soon as possible.



Dogs with demodex mange may have either localized areas of inflammation or generalized where the entire body is affected. If the disease is localized, there may be a few areas of hair loss with mild to moderate inflammation. You may see some scaling or crusting. These areas are usually on the legs or face and are not itchy.



In the generalized form of the disease, the entire body is affected with hair loss, inflammation, scales, and crusting. Often, these dogs develop secondary bacterial and yeast skin infections that cause them to be itchy. They can also have infected feet.

Cats

Cats with demodex mange are generally very itchy. They have large areas of hair loss, usually on their bellies and legs. It can extend to their sides and face as well.

Diagnosis

Since demodex mange can mimic other skin diseases, a deep skin scrape needs to be performed to diagnose the disease. With a deep skin scrape, a dulled scalpel blade is used to scrape the skin until it bleeds slightly (the procedure doesn't hurt your pet). This means that the scrape went deep enough to where the mites live.



The sample obtained is then viewed under the microscope to look for the demodex mite. Several scrapes are performed to ensure a proper diagnosis. Additional tests are done to look for bacteria or mite that may be causing an infection.

For an adult dog with demodicosis, the underlying problem must be identified. This may involve lab work, x-rays, and ultrasounds.

Treatment

Once diagnosed, the treatment depends on the severity of the disease. If the mange is localized in a dog to a few small areas, the treatment involves boosting the immune system so that your dog can bring the disease under control. Benzoyl peroxide gel or shampoo may be used to help rid the body of the mites.



With generalized demodicosis, a whole body treatment is needed. This may be in the form of weekly-medicated baths or daily oral medicine. A skin scrape is performed every 2-4 weeks during treatment.

Treatment is not considered successful until the dog has had 2-3 consecutive negative skin scrapes. This means that most treatments last about 3 months. If the dog has demodicosis on his feet only, the treatment may take longer since this form is the most difficult to treat.

Other treatment must be given to control secondary infections as well during the mange treatment. This is usually in the form of oral antibiotics and oral anti-yeast medicines. For an adult dog with demodicosis, the treatment may be long term if no underlying cause is found.

Treatment for cats with demodicosis involves weekly lime sulfur baths. As with dogs, skin scrapes are performed throughout treatment until 2-3 consecutive scrapes are negative.

Most dogs with localized demodex mange and cats do well after treatment. With generalized demodex in young dogs, the treatment is more successful if recognized and treated early. About 10% of dogs with demodicosis cannot be cured. They will require long-term treatment. The success rate of adult dogs depends on the underlying disease causing the outbreak.

