

Demodectic Mites

What are they?

Demodectic mites are a tiny mite too small to be seen with the naked eye. Nearly all dogs acquire the mites from their mother during the first few days of life. These mites are considered normal skin fauna when present in small numbers. They produce disease only when an abnormal immune system allows their numbers to get out of control. This mostly occurs in puppies and adults with lowered immunity.

How do we diagnose mites?

Demodectic mite occurs in localised and generalised forms. The diagnosis is made by taking multiple skin scrapings and looking for the mites under the microscope. They are usually easy to find if present.



What signs will I see?

Localised demodectic mite: Usually occurs in dogs under 1 year old. The main sign is thinning around hair the eyelids, lips, corners of the mouth and occasionally on the base of the tail, legs and feet. In some cases the skin becomes scaly, red and infected.

Generalised demodectic mite: Develop patches of hair loss on the head, legs and tail base. They usually form large areas of hair loss. The skin will break down to form sores, crusts and draining tracts.

Are demodectic mites contagious?

Demodectic mites are not considered a contagious disease and isolation of affected dogs is generally not considered necessary. They cannot be passed to humans, cats or other dogs. They are known only for being transferred from mother to a new born pup.

Treatment

We treat demodectic mites with a dectomax, which is a broad spectrum anti-parasite medication. A weekly injection is administered starting at a 1/2 dose the first week to ensure your dog isn't sensitive the medication. If no reaction occurs a full dose will be administered weekly for up to 8 weeks. If your dog is sensitive to the injection another option available is a weekly bath in a specialised chemical. Neither of these treatments are registered for this purpose in dogs and your consent for using the drugs off-label will be required. During treatment we will need to perform a skin scrape every 2-4 weeks. This way we can monitor the effectiveness of the treatment and modifications can be made. Once 2 consecutive scrapes are negative treatment can finish, but another scrape should be taken after 1 month of finishing treatment.

Prognosis

The younger the dog the better the chance of a cure is. Most dogs under 1 1/2 years will recover completely. In some cases adult onset can be controlled but not cured.

Precautions

If your dog is being treated for demodectic mites it is a good idea not to use the flea product "comfortis" or heartworm preventatives while treatment is ongoing.

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