



Southern Counties

VETERINARY
SPECIALISTS

Canine demodicosis

Information Sheet

**Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists
Specialist Referral Service**



Canine demodicosis is a skin condition which is caused by parasitic mites called *Demodex*, and these microscopic creatures live in the dog's hair follicles and oil glands. They are very tiny parasites with a head, long tubular body and eight legs. It is completely normal for all dogs to have a small amount of them, but when the immune system weakens for any reason, it can become difficult for it to suppress the mites from spreading causing an infestation and inflammation. Although it can occur without an underlying problem. There are two types of canine demodicosis: localised and generalised.

Localised

Localised canine demodicosis occurs the most in early life, typically in puppies that are aged between 3 and 18 months. This form of the disease is usually mild and responds well to treatment, but most forms will disappear with

very little to no treatment at all. Symptoms associated with localised demodicosis are often mild and only affect the dog's face or legs. Fur can begin to thin and the skin can look scaly and red. In some cases, it can progress from localised to generalised which is more severe. The cause for localised demodicosis is not fully understood but in otherwise healthy puppies it is thought that there may be a genetic defect in the puppy's immune system which allows mite numbers to increase. This defect can improve as the puppy gets older.

Generalised

Generalised demodicosis is usually far more severe and usually occurs in either young (less than one year of age, with causes similar to the localised form), or adult animals. When occurring in adults, is usually triggered by a primary disease which is suppressing the dog's immune system such as cancer, or side effects of an immune suppressing medication. In generalised demodicosis skin lesions can start with the face and legs but then spread all over the dog's body. Dogs will experience hair loss and skin discoloration, but can also have a poor appetite and may be lethargic. The parasites damage the hair follicles which can lead to other bacterial infections. There may be bleeding and/or pus from the lesions and pain experienced, and the mites within the hair follicles can cause black head looking symptoms. Common triggers of this generalised disease can include hormonal diseases and cancer.

Diagnosis

Most of the diagnosis can be done through the physical symptoms, looking through the dog's medical history and by examining under the microscope samples from skin scrapings

and hair plucks. Rarely it is necessary to take a skin biopsy. Mostly localised demodicosis does not often require treatment and will only need to be observed, so this can usually clear up itself. Generalised demodicosis requires regular check-ups and skin scrapings looked at under a microscope to monitor the disease.

Treatment

The treatment involved in demodicosis depends on its severity and the dog's age. As mentioned before, localised forms do not always need treatment and can resolve itself as the dogs gets older. In these cases, it is useful to have check-ups along the way to monitor it but it usually clear up within 6-8 weeks. The generalised cases require more intensive treatment using tablets or spot-on products. Either treatment is done generally on a monthly basis. Getting the mites under control can take a long time and sometimes it is a case of controlling the disease, but not being able to cure it. Where the disease

comes on in adults it is important to find out why it has occurred, which can require blood tests and scans. Any other infections caused by this disease will be treated using antibiotics.

Prognosis

Generalised cases in young dogs may take weeks or months of treatment to control it. For adult generalised demodicosis prognosis is uncertain as most of these dogs will have an underlying disease which caused it. If their main illness can be diagnosed, then managing the demodicosis can be successful.

It is important to note that it is not contagious. It is thought that the only time mites can be passed between dogs is during a puppy's first few days from his mother. The best way to prevent it is to keep your dog in good health and keep an eye out for anything that may suppress your dog's immune system. Make sure to keep your dog up to date with worming and vaccinations.





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