



Sarcoptic Mange



Also Known As: *Sarcoptes scabiei* var. *canis*, Canine scabies

Transmission or Cause: Canine scabies is highly contagious. Transmission occurs through direct contact with a carrier animal, or when a mite falls off the skin of a carrier and survives in the environment long enough for it to infest a new host animal. At 50 - 59 F, mites can survive between four to 21 days in the environment without a host. At room temperature (68 - 77 F), mites can survive for two to six days.

Affected Animals: Dogs, coyotes, foxes, (humans, cats and other mammals can be transiently infected).

Overview: Sarcoptic mange is one of the most uncomfortable skin diseases that a dog can contract. Highly contagious, sarcoptic mange is caused by a mite called *Sarcoptes scabiei* var. *canis* and is transmissible to humans. These mites burrow into a host animal's skin, causing scaling, yellowish crust, hair matting and loss, and severe itching.

Some dogs never develop the classic skin lesions, but will itch constantly year round. Often, animals with this condition will be misdiagnosed as having allergies. Diagnosis can be very difficult because the mites frequently are not found on skin scrapings. Thus, treatment frequently is based on the suspicion of scabies, rather than a definitive diagnosis.

Generally, topical dips are used for treatment. Injectable and oral medications are available, but certain breeds can have a fatal sensitivity to the medication. A veterinarian should be consulted about the proper course of treatment. The prognosis for sarcoptic mange is excellent with proper treatment.

Symptoms: Severe, constant itching at any time of year is a classic symptom of sarcoptic mange. Areas with less hair, such as the earflaps, elbows, hocks, ventral abdomen, chest, and legs, are affected most commonly. The mites cause hair loss, a reddened rash, and yellowish crusts to form on the skin in affected areas. Typically the ear margins and elbows are affected most severely. The ear margins tend to have thickened, crusty material on the tips and yellow scales. The animal may develop a secondary skin infection and severe scratches from the trauma of constantly scratching. The lymph nodes also may swell as a result of mite related inflammation.



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Description: Canine scabies is caused by a mite called *Sarcoptes scabiei* var. *Canis*. Although extremely small, these mites can cause severe itching and skin irritation that will decrease a dog's quality of life significantly. The female mites dig into the superficial layers of the skin to lay their eggs. Once the eggs hatch, the larvae migrate nearby and then dig deeper into the skin to mature into adults. This process causes severe inflammation, irritation, itching, and rashes. With a 21-day life cycle, the mites can replicate quickly, causing a rapid increase in numbers and more skin irritation over larger areas.



The mites can be passed to other animals, such as coyotes, foxes, and (transiently) humans. People who have acquired mites will develop itchy red bumps on their body. These lesions last for approximately two weeks, after which they usually disappear on their own. Repeated contact with the affected animal can cause the lesions to remain for long periods of time. A medical dermatologist should be consulted about any human skin lesions or questions about mites.

Diagnosis: A definitive diagnosis of sarcoptic mange is often difficult. Several skin scrapes typically are taken and then examined under a microscope. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to detect mites, especially if the animal has had mites for a long time or has had several recent baths or dips.

Other tests can be used to aid in a diagnosis, such as the pinna-pedal reflex test. This test is given by rubbing the ear margin, or pinna, between the fingers and watching to see if the dog attempts to scratch the ear with its hind leg. If it does, then scabies is the presumptive diagnosis. Generally, if scabies is suspected, treatment should begin immediately. A prompt response to therapy, such as a decrease in itching, generally means the assumption of sarcoptic mange was correct.

Prognosis: With proper treatment and prevention, the prognosis for a cure is excellent.

Treatment: Treatment options for scabies mange include antiparasitic prescription medications such as Revolution spot on, or Bravecto and Nexgard chewable tablets; older treatment options include ivermectin or milbemycin given every 1- 2 weeks for 6 weeks or weekly prescription insecticidal dips for 4-6 weeks. With scabies, all dogs in the household must be treated at the same time, even if they are not showing signs yet, because some dogs can carry the mites and have no symptoms. Dogs with scabies may also have secondary bacterial or yeast skin infections which contribute to the itch and antibiotics may be needed. Herding breeds should not receive ivermectin due to risk of lethal toxicity, and all treatments should be prescribed and monitored by a veterinarian.

Prevention: The best way to prevent transmission is to avoid any contact with animals or the environment of any animal that may be carrying scabies. All boarding facilities, grooming equipment, and bedding materials should be washed thoroughly and disinfected on a regular basis.

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