

# Sarcoptic Mange

- Sarcoptic mange (scabies) is an intensely itchy skin condition in dogs.
- It is caused by *Sarcoptes scabiei*, microscopic mites that penetrate the skin surface.
- The condition is highly contagious among dogs and is spread by direct contact.
- The mite may be transferred to people and cats, but these species are not natural hosts for the mite, and infestations usually resolve on their own.
- Signs include red, crusty, itchy lesions on the face, edges of the ear flaps, elbows, chest, and abdomen.
- Diagnosis is made by finding the mite in debris obtained from a skin scraping, or by response to treatment.
- There are many oral, injectable, and topical treatments for sarcoptic mange.
- Treatment may also include antibiotics and soothing shampoos.
- It might take 4 to 8 weeks for signs to resolve.
- Environmental decontamination is generally not needed, although bedding, collars, and harnesses should be washed to avoid reinfestation.

## What Is Sarcoptic Mange?

Sarcoptic mange (scabies) is an intensely itchy skin condition of dogs that is caused by microscopic mites called *Sarcoptes scabiei*.

## Is Sarcoptic Mange Contagious?

This condition is highly contagious among dogs. Most dogs with scabies show signs, but some dogs may be carriers and appear to be relatively unaffected.

Occasionally, the mites can also be transferred to humans or other pets in the household. Pet owners with scabies may experience an itchy rash on the arms, abdomen, or chest. However, humans are not natural hosts for this mite, and infestations generally resolve on their own. Pet owners are advised to consult their doctor for evaluation and treatment.

While these mites may be transferred to cats in the household, they generally prefer dogs. Infestations

in cats usually resolve without treatment. Cats with intense itching of the face and neck area are often infested with a different type of mite.

## What Causes This Condition?

Dogs become infested when they come into direct contact with other dogs that have these mites. Female mites penetrate the skin and lay eggs, causing intense itchiness. Once the eggs hatch, larvae tunnel under the skin, increasing the dog's discomfort.

Sarcoptic mange (scabies) is an intensely itchy skin condition in dogs.

## What Are the Signs of Sarcoptic Mange?

Dogs with scabies typically have red, crusty, skin lesions on the elbows, edges of the ear flaps, face, chest, and abdomen, although the lesions may spread to all regions of the body. The itchiness may become so intense that dogs will essentially mutilate themselves, scratching until the skin is raw and hairless. Once this occurs, secondary skin infections are common.

## How Is the Condition Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will need to perform a deep skin scraping to reach the mites beneath the skin surface. This involves gently scraping several areas of affected skin with a scalpel blade until the area bleeds slightly. Several skin scrapings are usually done at different affected locations, and the resulting samples of skin cells and debris are mounted on a slide and examined under a microscope. A diagnosis is made when these tiny mites are identified on microscopic view.

Even with a skin scraping, mites are often difficult to find. In fact, it's estimated that mites are only found in 30% to 50% of skin scrapings performed on infested dogs. That's why your veterinarian may still recommend treatment if your dog's signs are consistent with scabies, even though mites

## Common Conditions

may not have been found after performing a skin scraping.

### How Is Sarcoptic Mange Treated?

It is important to treat all dogs that come into regular contact with your dog, even if they don't show signs of infestation. Some dogs may be carriers of the mite, and your dog will continue to be reinfested if he or she is in direct contact with these dogs.

Several oral, injectable, and topical treatments are available. If topical dips are used, the entire dog must be treated, including the face and ears. It may take 4 to 8 weeks for signs to resolve.

In addition to parasite treatments, your veterinarian may recommend antibiotics for secondary skin infections and soothing shampoos to help eliminate crusts and reduce itching.

Unlike other parasites, such as fleas, which can persist in the environment for many months, these mites cannot survive off the animal for more than a few weeks. While environmental decontamination is not necessary in these cases, it's still a good idea to wash all bedding as well as collars and harnesses to avoid reinfestation.