

BASIC INFORMATION

Description and Causes

Sarcoptic mange is an itchy disease of dogs, coyotes, and foxes that is caused by the superficial burrowing mite *Sarcoptes scabiei* variety *canis*. The disease is sometimes called *scabies*. *Sarcoptes* mites can transiently infect humans and cats.

Clinical Signs

Scabies causes nonseasonal, intense itchiness in dogs that is often accompanied by secondary skin signs. Hair loss, redness, small red bumps, scabs, and dandruff are commonly found on the edges of the ears, elbows, ankles, and underside of the trunk (belly). With long-term infestations, skin changes may become widespread, but the top of the dog is usually unaffected.

Well-groomed animals may have intense itchiness, with minimal to no skin lesions. Enlarged lymph nodes may be present, along with weight loss and lethargy secondary to the chronic itching and discomfort.

Humans in contact with infected dogs may develop an itchy patch of small red bumps (papules).

Diagnostic Tests

Sarcoptic mange is suspected in any dog that is intensely itchy. Finding the mite, mite eggs, or mite fecal material on skin scrapings from affected areas confirms the diagnosis, but this evidence is found only 10-50% of the time. Sometimes the diagnosis is made even if mites are not found, by having a positive response to treatment for the mite.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

All dogs in contact with the infected dog must be treated, and in severe cases the environment must also be treated with antiparasite sprays.

Topical therapy involves the application of medications such as the following:

- Lime sulfur dips may be done weekly for 6-8 treatments.
- Selamectin (*Revolution*) is licensed for use once monthly, but it is more effective if applied every 2 weeks for a total of three treatments.
- Fipronil spray (*Frontline*) may be applied every 2 weeks for a total of three treatments.

Systemic therapy involves use of oral medications to kill the mites. Several products are not licensed for use against this mite but have been shown to be very effective, and the decision on whether to use them requires discussion with your veterinarian. The breed of dog infested must be considered, because some oral medications are not safe in certain breeds.

Secondary bacterial infections must be appropriately treated also.

Environmental treatment is easily accomplished with sprays available from your veterinarian or pet store, often with the same products used for treating flea infestations.

Follow-up Care

If your pet's itchiness has not decreased after 21 days of treatment, further diagnostic tests and re-evaluation are needed.

Prognosis

The prognosis is very good with adequate treatment of the mite and control of any secondary bacterial infections. All dogs in contact with the infested dog (including play companions) must be treated to prevent recurrence.

Rarely, humans exposed to these pets become slightly to very itchy from the mite, because it is contagious to humans. Evidence of the mite in people is usually small, itchy, red bumps, especially in areas that are in contact with the pet (such as hands, arms) or in areas that are tightly covered (such as pant lines near the waist). Some people need specific treatment for the mites and should discuss the situation with their medical provider.