

External Parasites: Demodectic Mites

The Basics Of Demodectic Mange

No one likes the thought of tiny mites they cannot see scurrying over their skin. However, dogs, cats, people, and in fact most mammals play host to many tiny creatures of which they are never aware. Demodectic mites are one of these miniscule players. The adults only measure a quarter of a millimeter in length and require a microscope to be seen. They have a cigar shape with a long tail and short stubby legs.

Demodectic mites live on dogs and cats in their hair follicles and sebaceous glands and almost never cause any problems. On people, they live in the skin, the eyelids, and folds of the nose. The host's immune system keeps the mite populations in balance. They only become a difficulty when the immune system does not adequately control them. Usually this only occurs in immunosuppressed or younger pets.

Demodectic Mite Species

- Demodex canis affects dogs.
- D. felis affects cats.

The Life Cycle Of Demodectic Mites

Demodectic mites spend their entire life on their host dog. They live in the upper layers of the skin. The female mites lay eggs which hatch into minute larvae. The larvae molt into nymphs which molt into adults. This entire cycle takes approximately twenty to thirty-five days.

Transmission of Demodectic Mites

Puppies are not born with demodectic mites. They receive their mites from their mother as the mites can only be transferred by direct contact. These parasites cannot survive off of their host animals.

Symptoms Of Demodectic Mite Infestation

Dogs with an outbreak of demodectic mites and showing symptoms are diagnosed with "demodectosis." These parasites most often create problems in puppies three to six months old in the juvenile onset form of demodectosis. The adult onset form of almost always involves animals with compromised immune systems from various causes.

Localized infestations:

- Small lesions appear in one or two regions of the body.
- These lesions typically have thinning or a lack of hair.
- Moderate to severe itchiness.

Generalized infestations:

- Severe itchiness.
- Lesions may cover large regions of the host dog's body.
- Inflammation of the skin and hair loss.
- Lesions may have crusty edges and a moist appearance

- Secondary skin infections might occur.
- In extreme cases, lethargy and depression can occur.
- Also in extreme cases, dogs may have a reduced or complete lack of appetite.

Hair loss occurs because demodectic mites live in the hair follicles. If the lesions begin to crack and release fluid, medical issues can become serious.

Cats rarely experience problems with these mites and when they do, the symptoms tend to be less severe than those in dogs.

Treatment And Prevention Of Demodectic Mites

A veterinarian will diagnose demodectic mange by observing a patient's clinical signs and obtaining a skin scraping to look for mites. By examining the sample through the microscope, any mites found will typically confirm the diagnosis. Usually demodectic mites occur in low enough populations on a healthy dog that they would not be seen otherwise.

To remove an infestation of demodectic mange, a pet will most likely receive a series of medicated dips over several weeks. Nursing care at home typically includes topical creams and medicated shampoos. Treatment of demodectic mange is usually very successful with faithful care. Any types of secondary skin infections and other symptoms are dealt with on a case by case basis.

To prevent your pet from having an infestation of demodectic mites, give it regular veterinary care and encourage a clean, happy lifestyle. Dogs with suppressed immune systems develop demodectosis because their immune systems cannot keep the mites under control. Dogs under stress, either from infection or from their home environment, are more likely to have problems.

Possibility Of Human Complications From Demodectic Mites

Demodectic mites are not contagious to people. Each species of mite typically only infests one species of animal. But never fear, people have their own species of mite that prefers them: *Demodex folliculorum*.

For further information regarding the effects of demodectosis and demodectic mites concerning people, please contact North Shore Veterinary Clinic at 847-966-3080.