

MANGE IN DOGS

PET CARE SHEET

Mange is a term for a mite (parasite) infestation of the skin of dogs. The parasites are microscopic and cannot be seen by the naked eye. The two main types of mange are:- **Sarcoptic (fox) mange** - caused by infestation with a mite, *Sarcoptes scabiei*, which live in tunnels made by burrowing through the skin and feed on the tissue they damage as they burrow. The female mites lay eggs in the burrows which develop into adults in about 3 weeks, the whole lifecycle taking place on the animal. Sarcoptic mange is highly infectious and is usually caught from dogs or foxes with mange, or from being in contact with an area where infected foxes have been. Sarcoptic mange usually presents as an itchy dog with a rash, particularly of ears, elbows and underside.

Demodectic mange is caused by a mite known as *Demodex* which lives in the hair follicles of all normal dogs. The mite usually causes no problems because numbers are kept low by the dog's immune system. However, in puppies and young dogs with underdeveloped immune systems and some dogs with damaged immune systems the mite population explodes causing the hair to fall out and the dog to scratch, lick or bite the skin, making it red and sometimes causing scabs. Demodectic mange often affects the skin around the eyes, feet, chest and under the abdomen but it can involve the whole body. Because this damages the skin, bacteria can then enter and cause a secondary infection. *Demodex* is not infectious and cannot be transmitted dog to dog.

To **diagnose** mange we will take a skin scraping from affected areas and examine it under the microscope. This can normally be done in a conscious animal but multiple samples need to be taken and the skin must be scraped deeply, so some animals may need to be sedated. Hairs can also be plucked from affected areas: demodectic mange is sometimes diagnosed in this way as the mites live down the hair follicles and can remain attached to the hairs on removal. Fox mange mites often burrow deep within the skin so can be missed on skin scrapes. In cases where your vet is suspicious of mange but cannot find mites, a blood sample may be taken to look for antibodies against the mites. It takes a few days to get these results as this specialised test is run at an external laboratory.

Sarcoptic mange will often respond to topical flea treatment such as Stronghold or Advocate, but sometimes a series of insecticidal injections (Ivermectin) is required. Additionally the house should be sprayed with a household flea treatment to kill mite eggs in the environment. All dogs in a house should be treated. In some cases we have seen resistance to these drugs and a strong anti-parasitic dip (Aludex) is required instead, which is applied weekly for four weeks.

Demodectic mange is treated with Aludex baths weekly until cured. Puppies can need 8-12 weeks of baths, so if the disease is uncomplicated by infection and your puppy is well, the vet may decide to let your pet self-cure (which is common). Older animals will need treatment as well as investigation of possible underlying diseases. This may involve blood sampling, radiographs (X rays) and/or ultrasound to rule out internal disease. Antibiotics are required in most cases, for a period of several weeks.

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