

SkinVetCLINIC

Sarcoptes

Also called:

- Scabies
- Sarcoptic mange
- Sarcoptic acariasis

What is *Sarcoptes*?

Sarcoptes is a microscopic mite that burrows in the outer layer of the skin of dogs. In doing so, it causes tremendous irritation: sarcoptic mange is one of the itchiest conditions in dogs. Although it can affect any area of the skin, the itching is often most severe on the dog's abdomen, chest, legs, and ears.

Where does the mite come from?

The mites can be transmitted when a dog is in contact with another infected pet dog or other member of the canine family (such as a fox). Although the mites spend their entire lives on the dog, some mites do fall off into the environment when the dog scratches. These mites can survive in the environment for up to 3 weeks in the right climate, and provide a source of infection for other dogs. Also, because some dogs can harbor (and transmit) the mite without showing signs of skin disease, all the dogs in the home of an infected dog have the potential to be infected and to require treatment.

Can the mite infect humans?

Yes. The mites prefer to live on dogs, but can also live for at least 6 days on humans. They cause an itchy, uncomfortable skin condition. If you are exhibiting any unusual symptoms, please see your physician or dermatologist.

How is it diagnosed?

The mite infestation is usually diagnosed by a skin scraping, which is a simple in-clinic procedure performed by a veterinarian. Since the mites can be very difficult to find, we sometimes make the diagnosis based on the signs exhibited by the dog and their subsequent response to treatment.

How is it treated?

The likelihood of a cure with *Sarcoptes* is excellent. The mites can be killed with a series of medicated dips, sprays, or medications. Most of these treatments are performed several times, over 3 to 8 weeks, in order to kill all the life stages of the mite. In some cases, the dog's immediate environment is also treated to reduce the risk of contagion. It is also a good idea to wash the dog's bedding after every treatment. Because the itching can be so intense, anti-inflammatory medications are also sometimes prescribed. Some dogs become itchier a day or two after the first treatment, but the treatments should reduce the itching significantly within 2 weeks. Any other dogs living in the household should receive simultaneous treatment.