

WHAT IS SARCOPTIC MANGE?

Mange is a parasitic skin disease caused by microscopic mites. Two different mange mites cause skin disease in pets. One lives just under the surface of the skin, while the other resides deep in the hair follicles. Although both mites share some similar characteristics, there are also important differences. It is important not to confuse the two types of mange because they have different causes, treatments, and prognoses.

What causes sarcoptic mange?

Sarcoptic mange is caused by a mite that burrows just beneath the surface of the skin. It may also crawl around on the skin surface. This mite feeds on material in and on the skin.

What does it do to the dog?

The presence of the sarcoptic mite causes severe itching. The pet will chew and scratch its skin constantly. This leads to the loss of large amounts of hair, especially on the legs and belly in dogs and around face & ears in cats. Eventually, the skin will become thickened and will darken due to pigmentation.

Is it contagious?

Sarcoptic mange is highly contagious to other pets; it is also contagious to humans. The pet's bedding should be washed in hot water with bleach or, preferably, discarded. Although the mites are not able to complete their life cycle on humans, they will cause quite a bit of itching before they finally die. Contact your physician if any family members develop an itching skin rash. Tell your physician that you have been exposed to sarcoptic mange (also known as scabies). Re-infestation from the dog or the premises can result in continued itching.

How is sarcoptic mange diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made by a skin scraping that is examined under the microscope. However, only a small number of mites may be present. Because of this, a pet may be strongly suspected of having sarcoptic mange, but all skin scrapings are negative. A presumptive diagnosis can be made because the signs are quite typical. Age is not a significant factor in sarcoptic mange. Although most common in puppies & kittens, it affects pets of all ages.

How is it treated?

Current treatment involves several steps to kill the mites on your pet and in the environment.

First, a drug will be prescribed to kill the mites on your pet. The drug may be oral, injectable or a topical solution that is absorbed through the skin. This drug is usually given every 2-weeks for a total of 3-4 treatments.

Secondly, antibiotics may be prescribed to treat any secondary skin infections that developed from your pet scratching at its skin.

Third, cortisone may be prescribed to help with the scratching caused by the mites.

Forth, your pet's bedding should be washed in hot water with bleach or discarded.

