

External Parasites

At some point in their lives, many pets experience discomfort caused by external parasites such as fleas, ticks, or mites on their skin or in their ears. These parasites can be extremely irritating to pets and can cause serious skin problems or even carry disease. Although this brochure provides basic information about the most common external parasites, your veterinarian is your best source of advice regarding your pet's needs. Modern medicines make treatment, control, and prevention of many external parasites much easier than in the past.

Fleas

Flea Basics

Fleas thrive when the weather is warm and humid. Depending on your climate, fleas may be a seasonal or year-round problem. Your pet can pick up fleas wherever an infestation exists, often in areas frequented by other cats and dogs. Adult fleas are dark brown, no bigger than a sesame seed, and able to move rapidly over your pet's skin.

Adult fleas live their entire lives on your pet. Female fleas begin laying eggs within 24 hours of selecting your pet as a host, producing up to 50 eggs each day. These eggs fall from your pet onto the floor or furniture, including your pet's bed, or onto any other indoor or outdoor area where your pet happens to go. Tiny, worm-like larvae hatch from the eggs and burrow into carpets, under furniture, or into soil before spinning a cocoon. The cocooned flea pupae can lie dormant (inactive) for weeks before emerging as adults that are ready to infest (or reinfest) your pet. The result is a flea life cycle of anywhere from 12 days to 6 months.

Risks and Consequences

You may not know that your pet has fleas until their number increases to the point that your pet is obviously uncomfortable. Signs of flea problems range from mild redness to severe scratching that can lead to open sores and skin infections. One of the first things you may notice on a pet with fleas is "flea dirt" — the black flea droppings left on your pet's coat.

Fleas bite animals and suck their blood; young or small pets with heavy flea infestations may become anemic. Some pets can develop an allergy to flea saliva that may result in more severe irritation and scratching. Also, pets can become infected with certain types of tapeworms if they ingest fleas carrying tapeworm eggs. In areas with moderate to severe flea infestations, people may also be bitten by fleas. While fleas are capable of transmitting several other infectious diseases to pets and people, this is rare.

Treatment and Control

Your veterinarian will recommend an appropriate flea control plan

for your pet based upon your needs and the severity of the flea infestation.

Fleas spend a lot of their time off of your pet and in the environment. In addition to treating your pet, reduce the flea population in your house by thoroughly cleaning your pet's sleeping quarters and vacuuming floors and furniture that your pet comes in contact with frequently. Careful and regular vacuuming/cleaning of the pet's living area helps to remove and kill flea eggs, larvae, and pupae. You may also have to treat your house with insecticides to kill the fleas; consult with your veterinarian about products safe for use around pets and children.

With moderate and severe flea infestations, you may be advised to treat your yard in addition to treating the inside of your home. Your veterinarian can recommend an appropriate course of action and suggest ways to prevent future flea infestations.

Ticks

Tick Basics

Hosting a tick is the price dogs or, less commonly, cats may pay for investigating shrubbery, brush, or wild undergrowth. Ticks have a four-stage life cycle, and immature ticks often feed on small, wild animals found in forests, prairies, and brush. Adult ticks seek larger hosts like dogs and cats who venture into these habitats. Tick exposure may be seasonal, depending on geographic location.

Risks and Consequences

Ticks are most often found around your dog's neck, in the ears, in the folds between the legs and the body, and between the toes. Cats may have ticks on their neck or face. Tick bites can cause skin irritation and heavy infestations can cause anemia in pets. Ticks are also capable of spreading serious infectious diseases (such as Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and others) to the pets and the people on which they feed. Disease risk varies by geographic area and tick species.

Treatment and Control

Prompt removal of ticks is very important because it lessens the chance of disease transmission from the tick to your pet. Remove ticks by carefully using tweezers to firmly grip the tick as close to the pet's skin as possible and gently pulling the tick free without twisting it. After removing the tick, crush it while avoiding contact with tick fluids that can carry disease. Do not attempt to smother the tick with alcohol or petroleum jelly, or apply a hot match to it, as this may cause the tick to regurgitate saliva into the wound, increasing the risk of disease.

Pets at risk for ticks should be treated during the tick season with an appropriate tick preventative. Your veterinarian can recommend

a product best suited to your pet's needs. Owners who take their pets to tick-prone areas during camping, sporting, or hiking trips should examine their pets for ticks immediately upon returning home and remove them from their pets. If your pet picks up ticks in your backyard, trimming bushes and removing brush may reduce your pet's exposure to tick habitats.

Ear Mites

Mite Basics

Ear mites are common in young cats and dogs, and generally confine themselves to the ears and surrounding area. Mites are tiny and individual mites may be seen only with the aid of a microscope. Your pet can pick up ear mites by close contact with an infested pet or its bedding.

Risks and Consequences

Ear mites can cause intense irritation of the ear canal. Signs of ear mite infestation include excessive head shaking and scratching of the ears. Your pet may scratch to the point that it creates bleeding sores around its ears. A brown or black ear discharge is common with ear mite infections.

Treatment and Control

Treatment of ear mites involves thorough ear cleaning and medication. Your veterinarian can recommend an effective treatment plan.

Sarcoptic Mange Mites

Mite Basics

Microscopic sarcoptic mange mites cause sarcoptic mange, also known as scabies. Sarcoptic mange mites affect dogs of all ages, during any time of the year. Sarcoptic mange mites are highly contagious to other dogs and may be passed by close contact with infested animals, bedding, or grooming tools.

Risks and Consequences

Sarcoptic mange mites burrow through the top layer of the dog's skin and cause intense itching. Clinical signs include generalized hair loss, a skin rash, and crusting. Skin infections may develop secondary to the intense irritation. People who come in close contact with an affected dog may develop a skin rash and should see their physician.

Treatment and Control

Dogs with sarcoptic mange require medication to kill the mites and additional treatment to soothe the skin and resolve related infections. Cleaning and treatment of the dog's environment is also necessary.

Demodectic Mange Mites

Mite Basics

Demodectic mange caused by demodectic mange mites is mainly a problem in dogs. Demodectic mange mites are microscopic, cigar-shaped, and not highly contagious. A mother dog, however, may pass the mites to her puppies.

Risks and Consequences

Localized demodectic mange tends to appear in young dogs as patches of scaly skin and redness around the eyes and mouth and, perhaps, the legs and trunk. Unlike other types of mange, demodectic mange may signal an underlying medical condition, and your pet's overall health should be carefully evaluated. Less commonly, young and old dogs experience a generalized form of demodectic mange and can exhibit widespread patches of redness, hair loss, and scaly, thickened skin.

Treatment and Control

Your veterinarian will discuss treatment options with you. Treatment of dogs with localized demodectic mange generally results in favorable outcomes. Generalized demodectic mange (demodectic mange), however, may be difficult to treat, and treatment may only control the condition, rather than cure it.



And Now A Note On Your Pet's *General Good Health*

A healthy pet is a happy companion. Your pet's daily well-being requires close attention to any hint of ill health. Regular physical examinations are important. Pets age more rapidly than people and can develop disease conditions that can go unnoticed, even to the most attentive pet owner. Veterinarians are skilled in detecting conditions that have gradual onset and subtle signs. Early detection allows problems to be treated most easily and affordably. Your pet's exam is also a great time to ask questions. Help foster early detection and treatment by scheduling regular examinations.

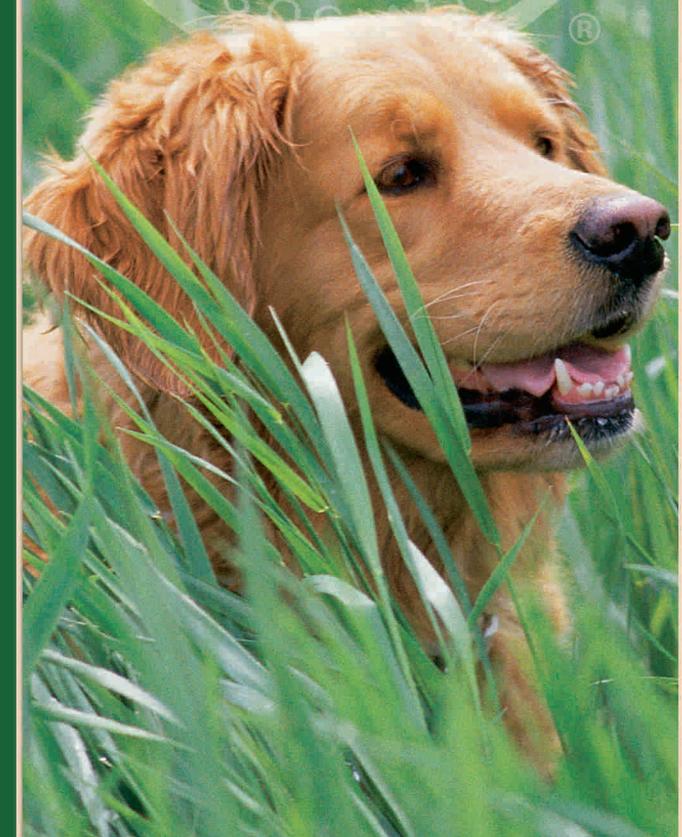
IMPORTANT POINTS

- Look for fleas, ticks, and coat abnormalities any time you groom your dog or cat or when you return home from areas that are likely to have higher numbers of these parasites.
- See your veterinarian if your pet excessively scratches, chews, or licks its haircoat, or persistently shakes its head. These clinical signs may indicate the presence of external parasites or other conditions requiring medical care.
- Prompt treatment of parasites lessens your pet's discomfort, decreases the chances of disease transmission from parasite to pet, and may reduce the degree of home infestation.
- Discuss the health of all family pets with your veterinarian when one pet becomes infested. Some parasites cycle among pets, making control of infestations difficult unless other pets are considered. Consult your veterinarian before beginning treatment.
- Tell your veterinarian if you have attempted any parasite remedies, as this may impact your veterinarian's recommendation.
- Be especially careful when applying insecticides to cats, as cats are particularly sensitive to these products. Never use a product that is not approved for cats, as the results could be lethal.
- Follow label directions carefully.
- Leave treatment to the experts. Your veterinarian offers technical expertise and can assist you in identifying products that are most likely to effectively and safely control your pet's parasite problem.



American Veterinary Medical Association
1931 North Meacham Road, Suite 100
Schaumburg, Illinois 60173 - 4360
Phone: 847-925-8070 • Fax: 847-925-1329
www.avma.org

What you should know about **EXTERNAL PARASITES**



CARING FOR ANIMALS
Today • Tomorrow • Always