

Sarcoptes scabiei

Sarcoptes scabiei is a common skin mite of dogs. This infestation causes a skin disease known as sarcoptic mange or scabies. The sarcoptic mite is not an insect, but is more closely related to spiders. *Sarcoptes* mites cannot be seen with the naked eye.

Sarcoptes mites are host specific, meaning that they prefer dogs over other animals. This does not mean that they will not infest other animals; they can infest humans and cats but they tend to not stay on these hosts for very long. When people refer to sarcoptic mange in cats they are referring to a mite called

Notoedres cati which is very similar to *Sarcoptes* mites. The treatment for both types of mite is the same.

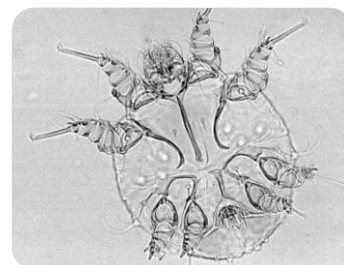


Adult *Sarcoptes* mites live for 3 to 4 weeks on the skin of dogs and cats where they mate. Afterwards the female burrows into the skin of the host animal and deposits 3 to 4 eggs in the tunnel behind her. The eggs hatch in 3 to 10 days and the recently hatched larvae move about on the surface of the skin of the host animal. The larvae will eventually molt into the nymphal stage and finally into an adult. The adults move about on the surface of the host's skin where they will

mate, starting the cycle over again.

The motion of the mite on and in the skin of the host animal is very itchy. Also, the burrowed mites and their eggs cause a significant allergic response that makes the host animal even itchier. When the dog that is affected with the mite scratches themselves they break open the tunnels that the mites have burrowed into and the mites are killed although the itch continues due to the toxins in the skin. The mites are most commonly found on hairless areas of the animal such as the ear flaps, elbows and the abdomen. Red, scaly, itchy skin is very characteristic of sarcoptic mange. This type of itching is also seen in air-borne and food allergies. It is important to have your veterinarian evaluate your pet to determine if the irritation to the skin is related to an allergy or a skin mite. As the infection continues most of the dog's body will be involved resulting in generalized hair loss as well as red, scaly, itchy skin.

Sarcoptes mites are mainly spread by direct contact between dogs, but animals with compromised immune systems are more prone to becoming infested with the mite. While the mites can survive off of the host for days to weeks, depending on their life stage, they are infective for only 36 hours which means that environmental decontamination is normally not necessary. It is highly recommended that if a pet that has sarcoptic mange lives in the house it is a good idea to wash any bedding that they have come into contact with and any collars or harnesses that the dog may have worn.



While *Sarcoptes* mites can be hard to diagnose definitively there are several different diagnostic tests that can be done. The most common test is a skin scraping where the top several layers of skin are "removed" to look and see if the mites are present. A biopsy can also be done but again the results can vary.

Even though this mite is hard to diagnose it is easy to treat and there are several choices available. It is important to remember to treat all of the dogs in the household if one dog is diagnosed with the mite condition or is suspected of having the mite. Your veterinarian may also prescribe antibiotics to fight the secondary bacterial infection associated with itching the skin and an antihistamine to help with the itching caused by the mites.

For more information feel free to contact Cedar Grove Veterinary Services at 920-668-6212 or go to www.veterinarypartner.com.