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## **Hot Spots**

A hot spot is a superficial skin infection that results when the normal skin bacteria overrun the skin's defences, as a result of damage to the skin surface. This is most often started by the dog chewing or scratching at the site. In the first stages of the formation of a hot spot, the skin becomes moist, inflamed (red), pruritic (itchy), and infected. Pus oozes from the damaged skin as bacterial infection sets in. The dried pus and damaged skin surface from the infection will form a tightly-adhered crust, and the dog will lose hair over the infection site. Frequently, dogs show pain when the site is touched at this stage.



Hot spots can enlarge rapidly, so early diagnosis – before your pet's hot spot involves a large area of the body -- is important. Dogs with dense undercoats are more likely to develop the problem than smooth-coated dogs. Hot spots are more common during hot, humid weather, but can occur year-round, depending on the inciting cause.

### **Causes**

Anything that creates irritation to the skin, causing the pet to chew or scratch at the site, can cause a hot spot. These may include Insect bites, allergies, excess skin-surface moisture, heavy/dense hair coats, matted hair and skin scrapes. Dogs and cats always have a bacterium in the mouth called *Staphylococcus intermedius*. This type of *Staph* is the most common infection found in hot spots.

The location of the hot spots may help your veterinarian determine the underlying cause of the problem. For example a hot spot over the hip could indicate flea infestation, hip arthritis or anal gland infection, just as a hot spot near an ear could indicate an ear problem, allergy, dental, pain, etc.

### **Treatment**

The first step your veterinarian will take is to clip and clean the inflamed/infected area to allow the air to get to it. (Moisture and pus trapped on the skin makes the hot spot worse.) Clipping and cleaning will allow your veterinarian to see how large the inflamed area is. Hot spots can be painful, so sedation or anaesthesia may be necessary in order to shave and clean the spot properly. Your veterinarian may need to perform cytology or culture the hot spot, to determine the best antibiotic to use during the treatment phase.

Treatment may involve medication including antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), glucocorticoids (steroids to reduce itchiness, pain, and swelling), topical medications or collars to prevent your pet from bothering the infected area.

The treatment your veterinarian chooses will depend on how bad the problem is, how much pain the animal is in, how long the problem has been going on, and if the problem is a recurring one. Some pets may get one or two hot spots and then never get another one again, while some pets may have frequent recurrences.