

VETERINARY ALLERGY & DERMATOLOGY, INC.

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Bacterial Skin Infection (Staph Infection)

Your animal has what is termed a bacterial infection which is caused by a bacteria called Staph pseudintermedius. It is not normally contagious to you or other animals. The causes of a bacterial infection are many and range from environmental such as heat and humidity, breed susceptibility (ex. Golden Retrievers and Newfoundlands tend to have more Staph infections than other breeds), internal medicine problems (ex.. Liver, kidney disease, diabetes, low thyroid, etc.), underlying food or inhalant allergy, and perhaps local skin immunity imbalances. Most Staph infections are seen in the summer and fall because heat and humidity along with an occasional flea bite provide the bacteria with a nice place to live. Many owners think their dog may have a “grass allergy” when really a Staph infection is present. Staph infections are itchy and the more an animal scratches, the worse the infection becomes. Staph infections are often mistaken for allergies or ringworm.

An animal is best treated for a Staph infection with antibiotics and bathing. Many times antibiotics need to be given for up to 6 to 8 weeks or until the infection is totally gone. This is especially true in older animals where their immune system is no longer as efficient at eliminating infection. If the infection totally heals while the animal is on antibiotics but recurs quickly once off, the animal may be treated with a staph vaccine which you can give at home twice a week.

Bathing in an antibacterial shampoo is also important and some Staph infections can be treated with just bathing alone. Weekly baths are usually advised at least until the infection is starting to get under control. Care must be taken to use the proper shampoo as some can be too drying and this will cause more itching. Tepid to cool water should be used in the bath because of its soothing nature. If flaking is present a few days after bathing, then the shampoo is probably too drying and a milder formulation should be used. Malaseb and Chlorhexidine are two of the antibacterial shampoos frequently used in this practice. Allergroom or Dermalyte are hypoallergenic shampoos used in animals with sensitive skin. Some doctors feel that Staph infections are best treated with cortisone (Prednisone) either orally or by injection. It is preferred to use antibiotics without cortisone because although cortisone will help the itching, it does not cure a bacterial infection and in fact, may worsen an infection.

If at any time you have questions about your pet’s therapy or condition, please do not hesitate to call.