

Cheyletiella Dermatitis or "Walking Dandruff"

What is Cheyletiella?

Cheyletiella, also called "Walking Dandruff" is a microscopic mite that can cause itching, sneezing, licking, rubbing, or upper respiratory problems in pets. It affects various species including dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, and probably wild animals. The mites are contagious and may infest both dogs and cats in the same household.

Symptoms range from no itching to severe itching, and sometimes, sneezing. Some pets develop dandruff along the topside of the back and are very itchy in this area when combed. The level of itching may be intense in some pets yet others are not itchy at all (asymptomatic carriers). Humans in contact with itchy pets may develop itching and small red "bumps" but these resolve when the mite on the pet is treated. Sometimes elderly pets with underlying problems such as diabetes, Cushing's disease, or other internal medicine problems are affected most by the mite because of a weakened immunity. A mite infestation can be "caught" anywhere pets come in contact with other pets ie. groomer, kennel, park, shopping, or playing with other pets.

The diagnosis of Cheyletiella is made by finding the mite or eggs on the skin or hair of the pet. Mites and eggs can also be found in a fecal examination. Skin scrapings, combings, or tape impressions are viewed under the microscope to find the mite or eggs. The mite may be difficult to find especially if a pet was just bathed or on cats as they are good groomers and tend to ingest the mite!

Treatment includes various pesticides. Different treatments are recommended depending upon the age and breed of your pet, the number of pets in the household, and where the pet lives. All pets that have come in contact with the affected pet should be treated. In addition to treating the pet, the home environment such as the carpet and upholstery needs to be treated with a product that controls fleas (those products in the household will also kill the mite). Tile floors need to be mopped and bedding washed as the mite can live off of the pet for up to 21 days! Humans who are experiencing skin symptoms should call their physician but most often our symptoms dissipate once the pet has been treated.