Information for owners

Answers to your questions about pemphigus foliaceus in dogs and cats

Pemphigus foliaceus is a disease of the immune system and the skin. In fact, it is the most common immunemediated skin disease in dogs and cats. Although pemphigus foliaceus can also occur in people, it is not contagious.

Pemphigus foliaceus occurs when the immune system begins attacking the skin. Dogs and cats with pemphigus foliaceus develop skin lesions that first start as small, red spots that then rapidly form a pustule (pimple) and burst. In most cases, you may only notice the thick crusts, or scabs, that form after the pimple bursts. Some pets with pemphigus foliaceus are itchy, but most are not. A pet with pemphigus foliaceus may develop skin infections as a result of the damage to the skin or rubbing.

WHY DOES IT DEVELOP?

The cause of pemphigus foliaceus is unknown. In dogs, pemphigus foliaceus is seen more commonly in certain breeds such as Akitas and Chow Chows. Rarely, certain drugs may be related to the development of pemphigus foliaceus. Exposure to sunlight (ultraviolet light) can worsen the skin condition.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Several tests may need to be performed if your veterinarian suspects your pet has pemphigus foliaceus, including

- Skin cytology (microscopic examination of superficial cell samples obtained from the skin) and bacterial or fungal culture to identify skin infections that may require treatment
- Blood tests and urine tests to diagnose other health conditions and help your pet's doctor determine which medications to use for pemphigus foliaceus
- Skin biopsy to confirm the diagnosis of pemphigus foliaceus by allowing a microscopic examination of all the layers of the skin

Many other skin conditions can look like pemphigus foliaceus. Multiple skin biopsy samples may need to be taken to obtain a sample that will confirm the diagnosis of pemphigus foliaceus.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

Medications that suppress the immune system are used to treat pemphigus foliaceus. Side effects can develop in response to these medications. Recheck examinations and tests will be required to monitor your pet's response to treatment and to monitor for side effects. Once your pet responds to the treatment, the medications will be decreased over time to find the lowest possible dose that can be used to manage your pet's pemphigus foliaceus.

WILL THE SKIN PROBLEMS RESOLVE?

Pemphigus foliaceus is a skin condition that typically waxes and wanes over time. For some pets, pemphigus foliaceus becomes a chronic condition that requires life-long monitoring and treatment. Very rarely, some pets will fully recover from the pemphigus foliaceus with treatment and never again develop signs of the skin condition.

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