

Health and welfare information about your cat from Vetlexicon Felis.



'Walking dandruff' (Cheyletiellosis)

Cheyletiella infection is a form of mange that is also known as rabbit mites and walking dandruff. This is an itchy skin condition caused by small parasites living on the skin surface. The mites can be found on many animals including dogs, cats and rabbits and can be transmitted from pets to people. Early recognition is important as the condition can be simply treated.

What causes cheyletiellosis?

The condition is caused by infestation with a small mite. This mite lives its whole life on the skin of a furry animal. Although the mites are small they can just be seen with the naked eye or a magnifying glass and may appear like small white flakes of skin that can move hence the name walking dandruff.

Most healthy animals seem to have some immunity to infection and the majority of affected animals are old, young or unwell. It is most commonly seen in puppies bought from pet shops or breeding centres. Kittens most commonly become infected from their mother in the first few weeks of life. Rabbits acquire infection from other infested individuals, not from

fresh hay or straw.

How would I know if my pet has cheyletiellosis?

Often the first sign noticed by owners is excessive scurf or dandruff formation on their pets skin. This may be accompanied by scratching and later small spots can develop. Occasionally owners are more severely affected than their pet and may themselves have itchy red patches or spots on their skin.

Can I catch mites from my pet?

The mites causing cheyletiellosis can move between animals and can cause itchy red lesions on people as well as pets. Lesions in people are generally very itchy and tend to affect arms, neck, chest and abdomen. Infection is most easily spread to people from cats and rabbits rather than dogs. If infection is controlled in pets the lesions on people will settle down after a few weeks with no specific treatment.

How will my vet know my cat has mites?

The condition is relatively easy to diagnose because the mites can easily be seen under a microscope. Small samples of skin or hair can be examined and mites and eggs will be seen in an active infection. The mites feed on the skin surface and eggs are laid on the hairs or skin surface.

How can the infection be treated?

Mites can be killed by the application of topical drops that kill parasites. Your vet will be able to prescribe this for you and tell you how to use it effectively. Since the infection can spread between animals, all animals that have regular contact with the infected individual should be treated at the same time (even if they are not showing any signs of disease). A number of treatments may be required over several weeks.

There is no product specifically recommended to kill any mites in the environment, eg pets' beds and carpets, but an environmental flea spray may help in this respect.



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