

Dog Skin Conditions: Hot Spots

The cause, symptoms, and treatment of canine hot spots (pyotraumatic dermatitis, acute moist dermatitis).

Hot spots

Photo courtesy Jimmy C.

Lattimer, DVM, MSCause: Excessive licking or chewing leading to skin inflammation and surface infections (bacterial and/or yeast). Initial triggers include allergies (to fleas, foods, or inhaled substances) and, less commonly, skin irritation, arthritis, mites, ear infections, and anal sac problems. Some dogs lick or chew themselves when they are bored or stressed. Other risk factors include a heavy coat and hot, humid weather.

Symptoms: Itchy, red, oozing, hairless areas, often found below the ears, at the base of the tail, or on the hindquarters (but can occur in other areas); incessant chewing or scratching at the area, which rapidly enlarges it, often within hours.

Treatment: Successful resolution hinges on treating the hot spot itself and the underlying problem that triggered it. Treatment of the hot spot involves clipping the surrounding hair, cleaning the lesion with medicated shampoo or mild antiseptic (such as chlorhexidine) and applying a drying agent (such as aluminum acetate).

Other treatments include oral medications to relieve pain and itching, and control bacterial or yeast infections. Sprays or ointments containing corticosteroids or local anesthetics may temporarily reduce itching. Fitting the dog with an Elizabethan collar or placing socks on the hind feet may discourage chewing and scratching. Some afflicted dogs, especially those who are bored or stressed, benefit from increased companionship (canine or human) and activity (games, walks, or obedience training). Treatment for the underlying cause of the hot spot varies, depending on the condition, its severity, and the dog's response to treatment.

Disclaimer: DogChannel.com's Dog Skin Conditions are intended for educational purposes only. They are not meant to replace the expertise and experience of a professional veterinarian. Do not use the information presented here to make decisions about your dog's ailment. If you notice changes in your dog's health or behavior, please take your pet to the nearest veterinarian or an emergency pet clinic as soon as possible.