

Coat Clipping Dilemmas

Tiny flying hair follicles can cause problems to humans when inhaled or embedded into skin.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. As I was doing some weekend touch-up grooming with my clippers on my Labrador Retriever, I found tiny black splinters everywhere. I am thinking they were not metal shards – they were more likely my dog's hair which found easy entry into my already soft shampoo-bathed fingers. What do you think?

A. I think you have solved the mystery. You have discovered yet another occupational hazard of dog grooming, those flying follicles that shoot off the clipper to become embedded in the skin. Those sharp little missiles can penetrate clothing and underwear too, causing groomers to find hairs sprouting in the most unusual places, chests, bellies, and regions I would rather not mention here. While some tightly-woven nylon uniforms may prevent them from going through clothing, they can still penetrate exposed areas. Inhaling these tiny hairs as well as airborne dog dander can also cause respiratory problems.

About 20 years ago, vacuum systems were invented that suck the hair and other debris right off the dog as it is clipped. Such systems also keep blades from getting clogged and keep the clipper cooler. This means blades stay sharper longer and there is less chance of "clipper burn" to the dog's sensitive skin. The clipped hair travels through a hose system and collects in a tank, making for a cleaner shop environment as well.

Several systems like this exist, but since they range in price from \$700 to \$1600, they may be too expensive for most home groomers. Your best bet may be to wear a sturdy nylon lab coat and check your skin carefully after each grooming session. Remove any hair splinters immediately with tweezers and follow up by dabbing with rubbing alcohol to prevent infection.

I would also question why you are clipping a Labrador Retriever. If it involves anything beyond cleaning out the footpads, I don't think it's a good idea. Labs need their hard outer coat for protection and it adds to their beauty as well. If you are doing it to cut down on shedding, I would recommend getting a carding tool to strip out dead and shed hairs and add this to your regular brushing regimen instead of giving your dog a haircut.

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