

Catch Your Dog's Hot Spots Early

The best treatment of dogs' and puppies' hot spots is prevention by caring for irritations before they become hot spots.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. What causes hot spots on dogs? My dog gets them and sometimes licks until the hair is gone.

A. Hot spots start off as simple skin irritations, possibly due to allergies, a scratch, or minor infection. The dog then creates the hot spot due to self-trauma, in the form of licking, scratching and rubbing. Sometimes, moisture in the hair can worsen the infection.

As the infection worsens, the itchiness increases, and the redness and inflammation start to spread like a wildfire. The hot spot then turns into pyoderma, a full-fledged skin infection that require antibiotics and anti-inflammatories to control. Most importantly, a dog should be prevented from scratching the hot spot by using a special collar or a sock on the back foot to restrict contact with toenails.

Diligent dog owners can detect hot spots in their early stages, and treat them early with a gentle twice-a-day scrub of a skin disinfectant such as diluted betadine. Ideally, clip the hair first. A topical ointment such as over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream will help reduce itchiness. If the affected area appears to be worsening, make a trip to your veterinarian before it turns into a major problem.