

Dog's Nose Color Could Mean Cancer

Too much sun is culprit if dog's pigment change is caused by squamous cell carcinoma.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. We have a 20-week-old Miniature Schnauzer. His nose rarely seems wet. His nose is still black, but I've noticed it seems just a tiny bit lighter around the top and down both sides. Is this something to be concerned with?

A. Much has been interpreted based on the appearance of a dog's nose. Is it wet, is it dry, is it cold, is it warm? Most of these observations, although interesting, have no relationship to your dog's health. Here is what you need to watch for:

Is there nasal discharge? If so, is the discharge clear, or thick and cloudy?

Clear discharge usually is the equivalent of mild allergies in people, while a thick discharge usually is a sign of an upper respiratory infection. If the discharge is only from one side of the nose, there could be something like a grass awn or other plant material stuck in the nasal passage. If there is bloody discharge, there could be nasal irritation and dryness, or a problem with blood clotting. In rare cases, bleeding from one side of the nose could be a clue that there is a mass or tumor in the airway.

Changes in the appearance of the pigmentation of the nose can be important. Nasal tumors such as squamous cell carcinomas can appear in dogs (especially light-coated ones), who are exposed to high levels of sunlight and UV radiation.

The only way to check your dog's body temperature is with the indignity of a rectal thermometer. If you want to be able to check your dog's temperature, buy a digital thermometer (for use in your dog only)! Anything greater than 102.5 could indicate an infection, and may warrant a trip to the veterinarian if it stays high or goes higher. Any dog who is excited can run a temperature of 103 degrees without any underlying illness.