

## Use Sunscreen to Reduce White Dog's Skin Cancer Risk

**Trimming face and feet hair won't increase risk of dog skin cancer.**

*By Jon Geller, DVM*

**Q.** I understand that dogs with white coats are prone to develop squamous cell carcinoma of the skin. Does shaving a white Poodle's face and feet increase the risk? Also, what is the ideal length of body coat in summer in relation to sun exposure, heat, ticks and fleas?

**A.** It is true that white-coated dogs tend to have a higher risk for skin cancer and other skin diseases, just as blonde and redheaded humans do.

It probably is fine to trim the hair off of your Poodle's face and feet, but avoid trimming the body hair too closely, since it provides some protection from the sun. One of the most common sites of skin cancer in dogs is on their hairless bellies, when they tend to lounge in the sun lying on their backs.

Some white-coated dogs such as Border Collies also are susceptible to skin cancer on their noses, especially if they are missing some black pigment, a protective substance containing melanin.

The primary strategy to minimize skin cancer risk in light-coated dogs is to minimize sun exposure and use an effective sunscreen ointment on their noses if they do not have protective pigment. Although the zinc in the ointment is potentially toxic, it is rare that dogs can lick enough to create a problem.