

Spring Allergies Can Affect Dogs, Too

According to Veterinary Pet Insurance, many canines experience springtime allergy symptoms.

Mark Edward Nero

Just as people experience an increase in allergies in the spring when pollutants and allergens are at their peak, dogs also experience springtime allergy symptoms.

Carol McConnell, DVM, manager of veterinary education and services for Veterinary Pet Insurance, explains that there are three main categories of allergies for dogs: flea allergies, inhaled allergens such as pollens, and food allergies. She offers the following tips to dog owners for recognizing, and possibly preventing, canine allergies:

Fleas: When a flea bites, it injects a small amount of saliva into your dog's body. Many dogs react to this saliva with itchy, irritable skin, typically on the rear part of the body, above the base of the tail. To avoid flea allergy dermatitis, it is best to administer flea control year-round, McConnell says.

Pollens: Inhaled allergens from pollens are typically seasonal and can come from grass, trees or blooming bushes, McConnell says. Two signs of pollen allergies are itchy skin and hair loss, usually toward the front of your dog's body on the neck, head, ears or underside of the front paws. If your dog experiences pollen allergies, McConnell advises you to speak to your dog's veterinarian.

Food: Allergies to food can exhibit the same pattern of itchy skin and hair loss on the front of your dog's body. The difference is that these allergies are not seasonal. You likely can manage your dog's allergies with a special diet recommended by a veterinarian. McConnell says that because many pet foods are byproducts of human food, pet food allergens are typically substances like chicken, beef, wheat and corn. If a veterinarian diagnoses a food allergy in your dog and suggests feeding him a unique diet with specific nutrient sources - like rabbit, venison and rice - it's important to adhere to the new diet and not allow exceptions.

Veterinary Pet Insurance claims data show that allergies are relatively common in dogs and cats, but with proper care and regular veterinarian visits, these allergic conditions can be managed.

Posted: April 1, 2006, 5 a.m. EST