



# Demodectic Mange in dogs.

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Demodectic mange (also known as red mange, follicular mange, or puppy mange) is a skin disease, generally of young dogs, caused by the mite, *Demodex canis*. It may surprise you to know that demodectic mites of various species live on the bodies of virtually every adult dog and most human beings, without causing any harm or irritation. These small (0.25 mm) mites that look like microscopic alligators live inside of the hair follicles (i.e., the pore within the skin through which the hair shaft comes through), hence the name follicular mange. In humans, the mites usually are found in the skin, eyelids, and the creases of the nose.

## What causes it?

Whether or not *Demodex* causes harm to a dog depends on the dog's ability to keep the mite under control. Demodectic mange is not a disease of poorly kept or dirty kennels. It is generally a disease of young dogs that have inadequate or poorly developed immune systems or older dogs that are suffering from a suppressed immune system.

## How is *Demodex mite* transmitted in dogs?

The mites are transferred directly from the mother to the puppies within the first week of life. Transmission of the mites is by direct contact only. That is, the mother and puppy must be physically touching, as the parasite cannot survive off of the animal. This is important because it means the kennel or bedding area does not become contaminated and therefore the environment need not be treated. Lesions of demodectic mange, if present, usually appear first around the puppy's head, as this is the area most in contact with the mother. Virtually every mother carries and transfers mites to her puppies. Most puppies are immune to the mite's effects and display no clinical signs or lesions. A few are not immune and it is these puppies that develop full-blown cases of mange.

## What are the signs of demodectic mange in dogs?

Dogs that are sensitive to the demodectic mites may develop a few (less than 5) isolated lesions (localized mange) or they may have generalized

mange, in which case, there are more than 5 lesions involving the entire body or region of the body. Most lesions in either form develop after four months of age.

## Prognosis and impact on breeding

Demodectic mange is not an *inherited* condition, but the suppressed immune system that allows the puppy to be susceptible to the mites can be. Remember that all puppies receive the mites from their mother, but only a few have ineffective immune systems and develop the mange. This sensitivity can be passed genetically through generations. Individuals that have a history of demodectic mange, and their parents and siblings, should not be bred. Through careful breeding, most cases of generalized demodicosis could be eliminated.

## Can I get *Demodex* from my dog?

The various species of *Demodex* mites tend to infest only one species of host animal, i.e., *Demodex canis* infests dogs, *Demodex bovis* infests cattle, and *Demodex folliculorum* infests humans.

## Conclusion

The mites are transferred from the mother to offspring in the first few days of life. The first sign of hair loss usually does not occur until after four months of age. Demodectic mange in dogs is usually curable or controllable with persistent treatment, except in rare cases with very immune suppressed individuals. The immune system condition that allows for the development of demodectic mange can be an inherited condition, and breeding of these animals should not occur.

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