

CHEYLETIELLOSIS

Cheyletiellosis is a skin disease that is caused by mites called *Cheyletiella spp.* (sometimes called 'walking dandruff'). This mite is contracted from dogs, cats, rabbits, or other animals that are infected with the mite. The mite lives in the superficial layers of the skin and on the surface of the skin. The mite adults, immature forms and eggs spend most of their time on the skin. They may survive for short periods of time in the environment.

The animal's signs may be symptomatic or non-symptomatic (i.e. animals may appear normal, itching very little, but still harbor the mites). Scaling is the most common clinical finding. Another common sign is itching. The scaling and itching are most common over the backs of animals, but can be located anywhere on the body. Due to self-trauma, these animals may have secondary crusting in these regions also.

Very few mites are necessary to cause clinical signs. Cheyletiellosis is diagnosed by skin scrapings, flea combings and/or preparations made from scales from the skin. Since the mites are often difficult to find, the diagnosis may also be based on resolution of clinical signs in response to the therapy (trial therapy for mites).

These mites can also be contagious to humans about 20% of the time. In humans, the clinical signs are small red, very itchy, grouped bumps often found on the forearms, chest and abdomen. These may have crusted centers. Humans should seek the advice of their physician if they are affected.

There are a variety of treatments available for cheyletiellosis. The first, LymDyp, is a sulfur based dip. This dip is very safe and used every 5-7 days for at least 6 dips. This solution should never be used full strength. It must dry on the pet. It is necessary to treat for the full length of time. Its drawbacks are the rotten egg smell and possible staining. It also tarnishes some jewelry.

The second treatment is ivermectin which is also effective in most cases for the treatment of cheyletiellosis. This is usually given by injection, but sometimes is used orally. It is not licensed for use in animals at this dosage, but is a widely used treatment for cheyletiellosis. It can not be used in Collies, Shelties or related breeds. It may cause severe reactions (including coma, personality change and death) in these breeds. Pets must be heartworm negative prior to initiating therapy.

A new topically applied treatment called Revolution is also effective to treat pets who have this mite, although it is not labeled for this use. Revolution is applied every 2 weeks for 3-5 treatments.

All other animals who contact the patient must also be treated. Household therapy may be needed since the mites may survive for short periods off the host. Premise sprays that are used for environmental flea treatment are usually sufficient.