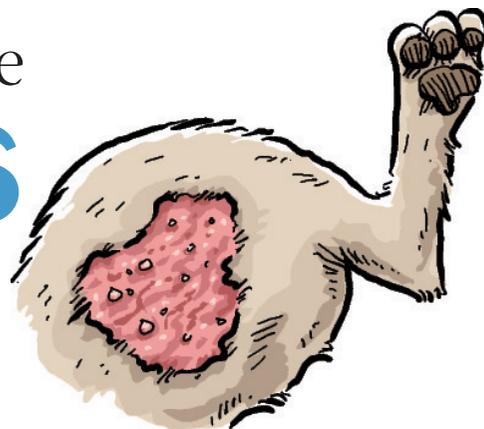


An FAQ about those horrible hot spots



The low-down on those itchy, inflamed and painful (ouch!) areas on your dog's skin that he just won't leave alone.

Most dog owners are familiar with “hot spots”—unfortunately, their dogs are too. A hot spot is an area of the skin that is raw and very painful. It is usually red and the hair has been rubbed out or fallen out. Any hair that remains in or around the area of ouch is caked with moist, smelly crusts. The spots look like a big smelly carpet burn. To get you into the veterinary vernacular, the medical term for a hot spot is pyotraumatic dermatitis. Because hot spots smell foul and hurt, you (and your dog) likely want to know how to treat and prevent them.

Why do hot spots occur?

Anything that can cause a dog to scratch or rub an area until it is inflamed (the most common offenders—flea bites or allergies) can contribute to hot spot formation. Once the skin surface is raw, infection can set in, and all the drainage and moisture associated with infection can set up a vicious cycle that a dog cannot break without assistance. It's impossible to fight the itch!

Which dogs get them?

Hot spots are a “dog thing” in general, but certain breeds seem to be more commonly affected, including rottweilers, German shepherds and golden retrievers. These dogs may be genetically predisposed to hot spots, or the more frequent appearance of this condition in these breeds may be related to the type of hair coat or other genetically linked issues such as allergies. Suffice it to say that any dog can get a hot spot if the conditions present themselves.

What should I do when I notice a hot spot?

The first thing many owners report is that their dogs are itching and licking or biting an area. They may see that the hair is thinning in the area. If you allow this maelstrom of muckiness to progress, odor soon develops. So

if you see the warning signs before odor and moisture develop, sometimes you can stop the progression by preventing your dog from irritating the spot further with licking and scratching. In case flea bites are the root of the trouble, make sure that your dog is on a comprehensive flea prevention program. You can try to clean the area with a mild soap, but there are two cautions here: Do not touch if it is painful for your dog and be sure that you can rinse off soap residue.

If foul smell has already developed, then infection is likely and you will probably need antibiotics to get control, which means a visit to your veterinarian for an examination before the antibiotic can be prescribed. Even if there is no foul odor but your dog really fights you when you try to examine the area, it is less stressful and painful for the pet (and staff!) to let your veterinarian sedate your dog for treatment.

How are they treated?

An important step is getting air to the wound to dry out the moisture and create an environment that is less amenable to continued bacterial growth. Because this condition is painful, management of advanced hot spots will involve sedation with hair clipping and wound management. The patient is usually sent home with antibiotics, topical preparations, pain medications and an Elizabethan collar to prevent self-trauma from itching.

Can hot spots be prevented in the first place?

To avoid them, eliminate possible causes (such as fleas) by making sure your dog is on an effective flea control program overseen by a veterinarian. If there is another pathology underlying your dog's hot spots, like allergic disease, your veterinarian can help you get to the bottom of it. There are no “at home” treatments that reliably prove effective for hot spots once infection has set in.