

HERVEY BAY VETERINARY SURGERY

Owner Information Series

DEMODEX **(Demodectic Mange)**

Demodex is a non-contagious skin disease that is caused by a tiny parasite which lives in the hair follicles and skin glands of dogs. These mites are present in the skin of many healthy dogs and do not cause disease. This suggests a hereditary predisposition to this disease or a connection between the dog's suppressed immune system and infection with mange.

Demodex occurs almost exclusively in young dogs. When the disease is seen in older dogs, the infection has almost always been present since their youth.

Demodectic mange is seen in two forms, localised and generalised. Localised demodex is confined to a few small areas of hair loss usually involving the face and/or front feet and is relatively easy to treat. Generalised demodex is one of the most severe canine skin diseases and treatment is not always successful. Many areas of the body are usually affected by this disease. The bare patches can be dry and crusty or may ooze pus or blood. A strong offensive odour is often present due to a secondary bacterial infection.

Since heredity is thought to be a factor in demodectic mange all infected dogs should be desexed. Even though a litter of pups with an infected parent may not show symptoms of the disease, they can still pass it along to future offspring. Periods of high stress, such as a heat cycle, are thought to bring about or worsen a demodectic infection.

Animals with mild cases of mange usually recover well with prompt medical attention. If allowed to become severe, demodex requires a long-term, time consuming treatment. Because a defensive immune system plays an important role in this disease some animals are not able to recover successfully and require life-long treatment to keep it under control.

Any hair loss or bald patches on your dog should have prompt veterinary attention because the best chance for prompt recovery or control of demodectic mange depends on early detection.