

Acute Moist Dermatitis in Dogs

Emily Rothstein, DVM, DACVD

BASIC INFORMATION

Description

Acute moist dermatitis is a local skin irritation that arises when some primary problem leads to self-trauma, which initiates an itch-scratch cycle. It can occur in any breed and at any age. The lesion is commonly called a “hot spot.”

Causes

Acute moist dermatitis is common in animals with flea allergic dermatitis and ear infections. Other underlying problems include other parasites (such as skin mites), environmental allergy, food allergy, contact dermatitis, anal sac conditions, and problems that cause pets to rub their eyes. Hot spots occur most often in hot and humid weather. Predisposed animals tend to have a dense undercoat, as in the golden retriever, Labrador retriever, German shepherd dog, and Saint Bernard.

Clinical Signs

Acute moist dermatitis is an intensely itchy to sometimes painful irritation of the skin surface. It develops rapidly and has the following features:

- There is hair loss, redness to the skin, and a moist skin surface.
- Lesions typically affect the tail base area, the outer thighs, neck, and face.
- Lesions are often solitary, although multiple lesions can occur.
- The area affected may be related to the underlying cause. Lesions associated with flea allergy or anal sacs disease often occur on the rump and at the base of the tail. Lesions associated with ear infections occur on the neck and head (near the ear).

Diagnostic Tests

Diagnosis is based on the typical appearance of the lesion, a history of a very rapid onset, and extreme itchiness. It is usually a single lesion. The location of the lesion may help narrow down the suspected cause.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

It is important to identify and treat the underlying cause. Hair is clipped from the affected area to allow removal of all surface debris by gentle cleansing with a dilute antimicrobial solution (such as chlorhexidine or povidone-iodine). Clipping and cleaning may require sedation, because these lesions can be quite painful.

Topical astringents such as aluminum acetate 2% (Domeboro solution) may be helpful to dry the area. Sometimes systemic steroids are used (see handout on **Atopic Dermatitis in Dogs**) to break the itch cycle. If there is evidence of a secondary bacterial infection caused by the itching, systemic antibiotics are used. Often, an Elizabethan collar is applied to prevent further trauma and allow the area to heal.

Follow-up Care

Even when the underlying reason for the hot spot is addressed, some dogs repeatedly develop the lesions. Careful attention must be paid to regular grooming, hygiene, flea control, and ear cleaning, especially during hot and humid weather conditions. If systemic antibiotics are instituted, a recheck is often performed to be sure the infection is gone.

Prognosis

The prognosis is excellent for recovery, but diligence is required to prevent or lessen future episodes.