

Health Basics-Chin Acne, Submitted by Betty Osing

Canine acne is normally a young-dog disease, but it can persist into adulthood in breeds such as the Doberman Pinscher, Boxer, Bulldog, Great Dane, Cane Corso and Rottweiler. Most of the time, acne does not need treatment. However, when large painful abscesses keep forming, or if owners want to minimize scarring, there are ways to get it under control. Acne appears as red bumps, blackheads and pimples on the chin. It sometimes spreads to the upper lips that rest on the infected chin. It can be itchy- some dogs rub their faces on the carpet or furniture. In some dogs, large pustules form, which eventually drain, ending in open sores.

Acne is diagnosed based on the appearance of the lesions; however, other diseases can look the same. Demodex, a mite that causes a non-contagious mange, can produce similar, oozing pustules. The mites can easily be seen when a skin scraping or hair pluck is analyzed under the microscope. Ringworm can start out looking like acne and occurs in young dogs. A fungal culture is advised if ringworm is suspected.

Another disease of young dogs, puppy strangles, looks the same, but puppies with strangles are depressed and have a poor appetite.

Why are only certain dogs affected with acne? Genetics and imbalanced hormones may be contributors. Trauma is another possibility. If the short, bristly hairs on the chin break off below the skin surface, they can inflame the hair follicle, making it susceptible to bacterial invasion. None of these causes have been proven.

In a puppy, mild acne that's not causing discomfort can be left, to see if it will be outgrown. However, treatment should be considered if the chin is swollen and hurting, or if the acne persists.

Therapy is either topical or systemic (or both). Washing with benzoyl peroxide shampoo helps clean the hair follicles and prevent pustule formation. However, use only veterinary products – human preparations are often too strong. Scrubbing two or three times weekly is sufficient. The antibiotic mupirocin (Bactroban) can be rubbed in twice daily. It penetrates well and is effective at killing the bacteria most commonly involved in chin acne. Topical steroids such as hydrocortisone can also be used to decrease swelling and inflammation. Severe cases of acne require systemic (oral) antibiotics. Treatment may have to be continued for up to eight weeks for resolution.

Some people have tried human acne products. For example, retinoids (e.g., Accutane) help dry up the glands and reduce pimple formation in people. This does not work in dogs because the glands do not seem to be the source of the problem.

Written by: Dr. Jeff Grognet©. Dr. Grognet is a practicing veterinarian in Qualicum Beach, BC, Canada combining traditional medicine, acupuncture, and VOM. He writes extensively for pet publications and also teaches online courses for Veterinary Assistants (www.ed2go.com). Author must be contacted for reprinting of this article. This article was first published in "Dogs in Canada" January 2009.