

Cheyletiella

Definition: *Cheyletiella* are mites that live on the skin, causing irritation, dandruff, and itchiness. A distinguishing feature of this mite species are the large, claw-like mouth parts. These mites can be found quite commonly on cats, dogs and rabbits, and other species. Though humans are not a natural host for this parasite, *Cheyletiella* mites can live on humans for a while, causing an itchy rash.

Infestation with *Cheyletiella* is also sometimes called "walking dandruff," since the movement of the mites among the flakes of skin tends to make it look like the dandruff is on the move. Infestation with *Cheyletiella* mites is called Cheyletiellosis.

Sometimes *Cheyletiella* is also called the "rabbit fur mite," but there are actually several species of *Cheyletiella* that tend to prefer different species of host.

Clinical Signs: The symptoms of *Cheyletiella* vary between animals (some have no symptoms at all) and occur primarily on the back, and may include:

Cheyletiella eggs attached to hair follicles

- flaky skin (dandruff)
- scratching (itchiness)
- reddened skin

- small bumps on the skin
- scabs on the skin
- mild hair loss

Cheyletiella living in top layer of skin

- if they mites go into the nose, sneezing and scratching at the face may also be present

Transmission: The mites are often picked up from direct contact with another infested animal. However, the mites and eggs can survive for a short time (days to weeks) in the environment so infestations can be picked up indirectly by contact with bedding or other objects carrying the mites.

Diagnosis: Though sometimes *Cheyletiella* mites can be seen moving about on the skin, in many cases they can be quite difficult to find. Scrapings of the skin, or samples of the dandruff caught on sticky tape or gathered by a fine comb, can be examined for the presence of the mites or their eggs. Their eggs can also sometimes be found in fecal samples because they are swallowed during self-grooming behavior. However, none of these methods are foolproof and the mites may not be "caught" even when they are present, especially in cats.

Cheyletiella may be strongly suspected based on the signs and symptoms, so even if the mites can't be found, it is still recommended to treat for *Cheyletiella*. Trial treatment is a good way to rule

Cheyletiella mite (magnified)



out *Cheyletiella* before moving on to investigate other causes of skin problems, which can be difficult to sort out.

Treatment: There are several options for treating *Cheyletiella*, and it is recommended to treat your pet and household situation. In addition to treating the pet, the household environment (floors, bedding, toys, etc.) must be treated as well.

All pets in the home should be treated at the same time, as it is possible for them to carry *Cheyletiella* without showing symptoms. Treatment options include:

- selamectin (e.g. Revolution®): selamectin (a parasite preventative applied to the skin) is effective at treating *Cheyletiella*.
- milbemycin (e.g. Interceptor®): an oral parasite preventative has also been used in cats and dogs to treat *Cheyletiella*.
- ivermectin: can be given orally or by injection (0.2-0.3mg/kg s/c). The doses required have caused adverse reactions, however, especially in some herding breeds of dogs along with a few other breeds, as well as occasional sensitive individuals.
- topical treatments such as sprays, shampoos, and dips: *Cheyletiella* responds fairly well to topical treatments effective against mites (e.g. pyrethrin-based products, lime-sulfur dips). These treatments are time-consuming, and if mites take refuge in the nasal passages, topical treatments will not be as effective as the above medications, which are absorbed into the body.

