

Dermatophilosis

What is dermatophilosis and what causes it?

Dermatophilosis is a skin disease caused by a bacterium called *Dermatophilus congolensis* (derm-ah-TOF-ill-us con-go-LEN-sis). The disease can affect many species of domestic and wild animals and occasionally humans. This condition is also known as lumpy wool, cutaneous streptothrichosis (cue-tane-EE-us strep-toe-thri-KO-sis), and strawberry footrot.

What animals get dermatophilosis?

Dermatophilosis can affect cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and less frequently pigs, dogs, and cats.

How can my animal get dermatophilosis?

The organism that causes dermatophilosis is found on the skin of diseased animals and also carrier animals that show no signs. It is thought to exist in soil but has not been isolated from the environment. Spread of the disease occurs by **direct contact** between animals or through exposure to contaminated surroundings (**fomites**) or by biting insects (**vectors**), particularly flies and ticks. Factors that break-down the natural protective barriers of the skin such as prolonged wetting by rain, high humidity, and high temperature allow the bacteria to spread.

How does dermatophilosis affect my animal?

Dermatophilosis can occur in animals of all ages but is more common in the young. Initially there is a matting of hair that has a "paintbrush" appearance. This leads to scab or crust

formation that may have pus underneath and a few animals may be itchy. The affected areas of cattle are often distributed over the head and the top of the neck and body. Sores caused by biting flies are typically found on the back while those caused by ticks are primarily on the head, ears, under the legs, and in the groin area. Horses show signs similar to cattle and both species can develop the condition on the lower legs from standing in water or wet pens. In sheep, the infection causes "lumpy wool." Less commonly, in tropical climates and in the presence of large numbers of ticks, affected animals can develop sores all over the body that can lead to death as their condition deteriorates.

Can I get dermatophilosis?

Yes. In humans, after **direct contact** with an infected animal, dermatophilosis leads to the development of pustules on the hands and arms that are not painful. These sores will later break down to form shallow red ulcers that heal and leave scars.

Who should I contact, if I suspect dermatophilus infection?

In Animals –

Contact your veterinarian.

In Humans –

Contact your physician.

How can I protect my animal from dermatophilosis?

The best methods to control infection are isolating infected animals, culling those that are chronically ill, and controlling external parasites (flies, ticks). Additionally, affected animals can be given antibiotics or treated externally. There is no vaccine for dermatophilosis.

How can I protect myself from dermatophilosis?

Wear gloves and protective clothing when working with an infected animal and wash thoroughly afterwards. If you have a weakened immune system, stay away from any known infected animal.

For More Information

Merck Manual. Dermatophilosis. <http://www.merckvetmanual.com/mvm/index.jsp?cfile=htm/bc/70600.htm>



Dermatophilosis is a bacterium that affects animals by causing scabs and crusts on the skin.

Photo from Danelle Bickett-Weddle, CFSPH