Cheyletiella (Rabbit Fur) Mites in Cats

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Cheyletiella (Rabbit Fur Mite) in Cats *Cheyletiella yasguri, C. blakei* (Rabbit Fur Mite)

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The disease caused by rabbit fur mites (*Cheyletiella*) is often called 'walking dandruff.' There are 3 common species of mites: *Cheyletiella yasguri*, *C. blakei*, and *C. parasitivorax*. On close observation of an infested cat, dog, or rabbit, it may be possible to see movement of the dandruff on the skin. The movement is caused by the mites moving around under the scales. *Cheyletiella* mites are found on animals throughout the United States. They generally do not cause significant disease.

What is the life cycle of *Cheyletiella* mites and how are they transmitted?

The female adult mite lays eggs on the host animal. The eggs hatch into larvae, develop into nymphs, and then adults. The life cycle is about 3 weeks.

The adult mite is transmitted by direct contact between animals. The female mites can live several days while off the host, so it is possible for animals to become infected through environmental contamination, e.g., bedding. The eggs may also contaminate the environment.

What are the symptoms of walking dandruff?

The rabbit fur mites cause skin irritation, usually along the back of the animal. Infested animals may have slight hair loss, scales (dandruff), itching, and possibly some thickening of the skin. Cats and rabbits may not show any signs of infestation.

How is an infestation with *Cheyletiella* diagnosed?

Mites may be seen on the animal, especially if you use a magnifying glass. Examining dandruff, hairs, or scrapings of the skin under the microscope can positively identify the mites or eggs.

> Because cats groom a lot, *Cheyletiella* infestations can sometimes be diagnosed in cats by finding the mites in the feces. (The animals swallow the mites which then go through the intestines without being digested.)

What is the treatment for an infestation with *Cheyletiella*?

Cheyletiella are killed by most of the common insecticides used against fleas including pyrethrins and fipronil. Be sure to use an insecticide approved for your species of pet. Rabbits and cats should NOT be treated with permethrin. Rabbits should NOT be treated with fipronil. Dips in lime sulfur and injections of ivermectin have also been used to treat an infestation with these mites. Follow your veterinarian's directions regarding the proper use of insecticides in or on your pet.

The mite can live for several days off the host, so the environment needs to be cleared of mites as well. At the same time the animals are treated, the environment may be fogged or sprayed.

Could I get *Cheyletiella* from my pet?

These mites can temporarily infest humans causing skin irritation and some itching. In severe cases, some open lesions may occur.

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