

Rainy weather adding to misery for pets with allergies



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Practice manager Keli Brace and Dr. Doug Riley of Animal Hospital and Clinic of Arlington examine Sadie for signs of a rash. Area veterinarians are seeing more pets with allergies this rainy spring. **Willis Knight** - Special to the Star-Telegram

BY ELIZABETH CAMPBELL
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Is your dog keeping you awake at night because he is constantly scratching or chewing on his paws?

He may be suffering from allergies to pollen or fleas, made worse this year by the rainy weather.

"We are having a very busy spring this year," said veterinary dermatologist Reid Garfield with the Animal Dermatology Referral Clinic in Grapevine.

Unlike humans, who can get hay fever from breathing in pollen, dogs primarily develop allergies through their skin, Garfield said.

"Dogs walking around on the floor act like a dust mop. If dogs are allergic, then their skin is going to itch," he said.

The most common areas are the ears, feet and underside.

Garfield said he is also concerned that if the rainy weather extends into the summer, it will be a bad time for man's best friend.

Alison Diesel, a clinical assistant professor in the department of small animal clinical sciences at Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, said that while pet allergies are common during spring and early summer, they can lead to

other problems.

“There is a lot of nature blooming and causing problems for our allergic pets,” Diesel wrote in an email. “The ‘flare’ in allergic skin disease, even when typically well controlled, leads to increases in itching and scratching. This can create secondary skin infections involving bacteria and/or yeast, which can compound the problem and make the dog/cat/horse even more itchy.”

Keli Brace, practice manager at Animal Hospital and Clinic of Arlington, said she is seeing lots of cases of pet allergies. Another concern is the proliferation of fleas and ticks during the wet weather, meaning that good prevention is essential, she said.

Some dogs are allergic to flea bites.

“Dogs can get one little flea bite and it can blow up into dermatitis,” she said.

There are excellent flea control products, she said, and pet owners should consult with their veterinarians on the best treatment.

A dog that is allergic to fleas can scratch for two weeks from one bite, Garfield said.

Diesel said that fleas, ticks and other biting insects thrive in warm, moist settings and that fleas in particular like a temperature range of 75 to 85 degrees and humidity of 70 to 85 percent when they breed.

Flea control is important year-round, but especially during spring and summer, she said.

Pet owners should also be on the alert for ticks, which can be more of a problem in rural settings, Garfield said.

“We get a little lazy – that’s how we run into problems with flea control. We had a pretty cold winter, and people get less consistent with applying monthly [flea prevention] products.

“By the time people realize they need to start, the dog has fleas and you are behind the curve,” he said.

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