

# The Animal Medical Clinic

405 Highway 74 North  
Peachtree City, Georgia 30269

Vince Obsitnik, DVM  
Suzy Obsitnik, DVM

Jeff Richardson, DVM  
William Landrum, DVM

Chris Schwenk, DVM

Office phone: (770) 487-1338  
[www.theAnimalMedicalClinic.com](http://www.theAnimalMedicalClinic.com)

---

## Staph Dermatitis and Hypersensitivity

*Staph* is a commonly used abbreviation for *Staphylococcus*, a group of bacteria commonly found on the skin. Dermatitis is a term that means that the skin is inflamed.

*Staph* is a normal resident of the skin of animals and humans; however, it is considered an opportunist. As long as the skin is healthy, *Staph* is dormant. But once the skin is irritated, *Staph* can invade the area and multiply rapidly.

### Causes of Skin Irritation

Scratching is the most common cause. Any disorder that causes itching can create the situation that allows *Staph* to become a problem. Common causes of itching include fleas, inhalant allergy, and food allergy. Irritating chemicals, such as flea and tick dips, also can cause itching.

### Diagnosis of *Staph* Lesions

There are two typical *Staph* lesions. One type begins as a red area on the skin with a pimple-like pustule in the center. The other type is a circular, reddish area with a crusty edge and hair loss in the center. The latter can easily be confused with ringworm. Finding either of these skin patterns in a dog that is scratching is highly suggestive of *Staph*.

Confirmation can be made with cultures or skin biopsy. However, the lesions are so typical that this is usually not necessary.

### Treatment of *Staph* Dermatitis

This bacterium is usually sensitive to several antibiotics. These include erythromycin, enrofloxacin, amoxicillin with clavulanic acid, lincomycin, dicloxacillin, and oxacillin. Since these medications can be given orally, treatment can occur at home. However, some infections may require 3-6 weeks of treatment before the infection is under control. Antibacterial shampoos and ointments can also be helpful in bring about rapid control of the infection.

The other essential part of treatment is stopping itching and scratching. Other tests may be needed to determine the cause or causes. Frequently, more than one condition contributes to itching.

### Contagion

Your dog is not contagious to you or to other pets. All dogs, cats, and people have *Staph* living on the skin as a normal resident.

### Rapid Recurrence following Treatment

If the *Staph* lesions return within a week or two following treatment, another situation may exist. This situation may be caused by an allergy to the *Staph* bacteria. This is called *Staph* hypersensitivity or *Staph* allergy.

The skin lesions that are caused by this disease are identical to those of a *Staph* dermatitis. The difference is recurrence. If *Staph* dermatitis is treated properly, the underlying cause is eliminated and itching is stopped, the bacterial skin disease should be eliminated. This situation may return if itching returns. However, when the dog with *Staph* hypersensitivity is treated, the skin lesions will return within a few days or weeks.

Since differentiation of *Staph* dermatitis and *Staph* hypersensitivity is based largely on recurrence, it is very important that treatment be continued long enough. This often means a month or more of antibiotics. If not, there will still be a question of which disease is present.

### **Treatment of *Staph* Hypersensitivity**

Treatment begins the same as for *Staph* dermatitis: oral antibiotics, medicated shampooing, and whatever is necessary to stop the itching. However, long-term control is best achieved with *Staph* bacterin. *Staph* bacterin is a solution of killed *Staph* bacteria that is injected into the dog in very tiny amounts. This is an attempt to reprogram the dog's immune system so it does not over-react to its own bacteria. The use of *Staph* bacterin begins as a series of daily injections into the layers of the skin. After the initial series is completed, the injections are given subcutaneously (just below the skin) on an interval of every 3-4 days to every 2 weeks. Since this is an ongoing treatment, it is done by you at home.

### **Fear of Injections**

Giving injections to dogs is much easier than you think. We can teach most people to give the injections in just a few minutes. Don't decide that you cannot do this until we show you the technique. However, if after seeing the technique you are still not comfortable doing it, we can arrange for one of our staff members to do these for you on a regular basis.

### **Success Rate**

Allergy shots are never successful 100% of the time, whether in dogs or in people. We expect up to 75% of the dogs to respond well.

### **Other Options Besides Injections**

If you do not give the injections, you cannot arrange for one of our staff members to do so, or your dog does not respond, it will have to be treated periodically with oral antibiotics and medicated baths. This is not the most desirable approach because *Staph* will often develop resistance to the antibiotics. If this occurs, a change in the specific antibiotic used will be necessary.