

Itchy Dog Project extended to all breeds of dog

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A popular University of Nottingham veterinary survey into the problem

of itchy skin allergies in dogs is being extended to include all breeds of dog after some interesting initial results.

The Itchy Dog Project is an online study that was launched at Crufts last year to help researchers examine the possible genetic and environmental causes of canine atopic dermatitis. Around 10% of all dogs suffer from [skin](#) allergies which can have a big impact on their lives and their owners.

The survey was originally aimed at people who own Labradors and Golden Retrievers but after a very big response of more than 4,000 dog owners and some promising early results, the survey is now being widened to include all dogs to help the team develop new ways to manage the condition.

Dr. Naomi Harvey from the University's School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, said: "We've had a fantastic response from Golden Retriever and Labrador owners to our Itchy Dog project website but we'd now like to identify any similarities or differences in the signs of atopic dermatitis between different breeds.

"The survey results so far tell us that the most common behavioural signs of the problem are scratching, paw licking or chewing, chewing other areas of their body and rubbing their face and muzzle. These signs were reported in dogs who had been diagnosed with skin allergies and skin infections but did not occur in dogs with no skin problems. This suggests that if your dog is displaying any of these symptoms, they are likely to have some form of skin problem and should be seen by a vet."

Other signs of allergies such as sneezing, runny nose and watery eyes were only reported in between 10 and 20% of dogs that had diagnosed allergies or other skin conditions, and were rarely seen in dogs with no history of skin issues. Dogs with [skin allergies](#) were most likely to be

affected on their ears, paws, armpits and groin areas.

Naomi added: "We have found that the dogs that scratched less severely tended to have their conditions managed without the use of medications, through a combination of management strategies including soothing non-medicated topical treatments, fatty acid supplements and bathing or wiping down, especially after walks and diet changes for [dogs](#) with food sensitivities. These methods are useful for managing any dog with allergies, even those on medication, to help alleviate the skin condition."

In terms of the genetic study, some of the [dog owners](#) who take part are asked to supply a DNA saliva sample. From the initial samples from Golden Retrievers and Labradors' DNA, the researchers have been able to confirm that these breeds have a genetic susceptibility to [atopic dermatitis](#), with 25-44% of this susceptibility due to genetics and 56-75% being influenced by a dog's environment. The early results support previous findings that the condition is complex with many hundreds or possibly thousands of genes contributing to disease risk in small ways.

The Itchy Dog research team is now asking owners of any breed of dog to take part in the study, whether their dog is itchy or not. Owners are asked to complete an online survey after registering their dog on the Itchy Dog Project website. The [survey](#) asks questions about the dog's health and lifestyle and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

More information: Full information on the research and details of how to register to take part are available here: www.itchydogproject.co.uk

Provided by University of Nottingham

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