

Exploring common types of feline mange

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Mange is a skin disease that can compromise a pet's well-being, leading to discomfort and potential health complications. Though it is a more common condition for dogs, cats can also be at risk, which is why owners should familiarize themselves with common varieties of feline mange.

Dr. Christina Gentry, a clinical assistant professor in dermatology at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, explores two contagious types of feline mange, notoedric and demodectic, and how important early detection and prevention are in maintaining the [skin](#) health of cats.

What is feline mange?

Feline mange is caused by [mites](#), or microscopic parasites, that create burrows in the skin or live on the skin's surface. The mites trigger inflammatory responses that eventually cause a variety of skin problems, including itching, hair loss, and discomfort.

Contagious feline mange is commonly caused by two different mites—*Notoedres cati* and *Demodex gatoi*. *N. cati* causes notoedric mange—also known as feline scabies—to spread easily among cats because of the mite's preference for infecting cats.

"*Notoedres* mites typically only burrow into the skin of cats, so felines tend to get notoedric mange from other cats; this type of mange results in high levels of itching that leads to crusty skin and hair loss on the ears, head, and face," Gentry said. "These mites rarely affect humans but can with prolonged, direct contact, causing extreme itching and possibly a rash. Owners should speak directly to their physician if they have concerns about a skin rash that could be mange."

Feline demodectic mange is caused by an overgrowth of *D. gatoi*—a feline-specific *Demodex* mite that is only contagious between cats—on the skin; cats that develop demodectic mange experience high levels of itching that may encourage them to excessively groom themselves.

"Cats affected by *D. gatoi* typically have self-induced alopecia, or hair loss, on the torso and proximal limbs (shoulder and hip regions), caused

by excessive licking," Gentry said. "The licking may be severe enough to cause self-induced erosions, or open sores on the skin, and the skin may or may not be inflamed."

Regardless of the specific mite, owners can work with a veterinarian to treat the condition and prevent pets from inadvertently harming themselves. If left untreated, the resulting self-trauma, marked by [hair loss](#) and open sores, can lead to a range of complications and decline in a cat's overall health.

"*N. cati* and *D. gatoi* can predispose cats to additional skin infections and can lead to weight loss, lethargy, and decreased appetite," Gentry explained. "In outdoor cats, skin damage from mites and self-trauma can increase the risk of developing ringworm, a common zoonotic disease in young cats."

Veterinary care and treatment

With prompt veterinary attention, owners can reduce the risks associated with untreated mange and prevent the condition from worsening. Gentry encourages owners to seek a veterinarian's guidance for thorough examinations and appropriate diagnostic tests to identify the cause of a pet's condition.

"Mites are microscopic—you cannot see them with the naked eye—so if owners have concerns about mange, they should go to their veterinarian," Gentry said. "By collecting a scraping of the infected skin and looking under a microscope, veterinarians can check for mites or use additional tests to determine if the pet has a bacterial skin infection, ringworm, or different inflammatory disease such as an allergy."

Beyond diagnosing mange, veterinarians are crucial to the treatment of mange, as specialized medications are necessary to target the specific

[mite](#) responsible for the skin condition. Depending on the type of mange and severity of the condition, a veterinarian may prescribe topical ointments, oral medications, or injections.

"Nearly all the medications for notoedric and demodectic mange are prescription and for the few that are not, guidance on dosing and frequency should still come from a veterinarian to avoid adverse events," Gentry explained. "There are fewer options for treating demodectic mange because Demodex mites have been historically more difficult to eradicate, yet certain prescription spot ons—topical medications that are applied to the back of the neck—have good success treating both types of mange, are easy to use, and have low adverse effects."

Medications prescribed by a veterinarian can also be useful for preventing mange.

"D. gatoi is contagious to other cats who are not on specific types of ectoparasite prevention (for fleas, ticks, mange, etc.), so the use of routine prescription ectoparasite control is one way owners can protect their cats," Gentry said. "The same spot-on products used to treat mange mites are also good preventatives. Keeping [cats](#) indoors also will reduce their exposure to ectoparasites."

By understanding various mange types and seeking timely and thorough management from veterinarians, owners prevent the spread of feline mange while ensuring the health and comfort of their feline companions.

Provided by Texas A&M University

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