

MANGE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

WILDLIFE HEALTH FACT SHEET

Mange is a skin infection caused by microscopic mites. It is quite commonly reported in coyotes and has occurred in other canids in British Columbia, a number of cases in coyotes were reported in 1999. Although animals are not often presented for diagnosis, it is believed the infection is most often caused by the *Sarcoptes scabiei* mite. Mange is also reported to occur in other locations in Canada especially in red fox and wolves. Sarcoptic mange has also been reported in other wild and domestic species throughout the world, including humans.

Sarcoptes mites spend their entire life cycle within the skin of the host. They are transmitted by direct contact between animals and their immediate surroundings (i.e. bedding). They are usually most easily transmitted between individuals of the same species.

The mites burrow through the skin causing a severe reaction and inflammation. The skin weeps fluid, thickens, darkens and hair is easily lost. Thick crusts form and there may be many self-inflicted wounds from the extreme irritation. Hair loss and skin changes are typically on the legs, tail and face, but may extend over areas of the body the animal can reach with its teeth or claws. Severely affected animals may be weak and behave strangely, often while seeking shelter. Most affected animals loose body condition and can die of hypothermia and exposure due to the lack of hair.

Other skin conditions and parasites, such as lice and fleas, can also cause irritation, skin and hair changes. The diagnosis of sarcoptic mange can only be made by microscopic examination of the skin for mites. The entire animal may be submitted for necropsy, or portions of the affected skin may be preserved in 10% formalin. This parasite can potentially be transmitted to humans or domestic dogs, however, the close contact required makes this unlikely if normal precautions are taken. Precautions include wearing disposable gloves and isolating carcasses and bedding.

Although severely affected animals may die, the impact of this parasite on populations is not known. It is suggested that the mites are usually present in the population from year to year, with outbreaks of clinical disease occurring when populations are at high density.