

Veterinary Fact Sheet

Frequently Asked Questions - Allergic / Atopic Skin Disease

New Greyhounds Australasia Rules effective 1 July 2024

GAR 138 Meaning of *exempted substance*

An *exempted substance* includes the following substances:

...

(e) cyclosporin, tacrolimus, oclacitinib or lokivetmab when *administered* to a *greyhound* as an immunomodifier and where it has been prescribed by a *veterinarian* for the sole purpose of treating or preventing a chronic condition in a *greyhound* including superficial chronic keratitis (pannus) or allergic/atopic dermatitis.

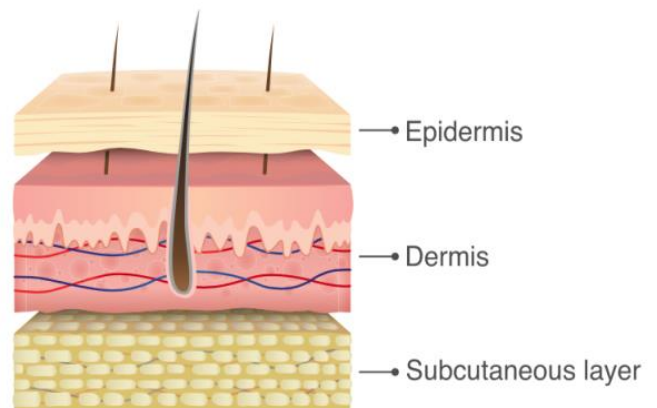
What is skin made of?

Skin is made up of three layers:

Epidermis: the outer layer. New skin cells are made at the bottom of this layer and move towards the surface where they form a compact coating of dead skin cells. These dead skin cells are continuously shed from the surface layer and replaced from cells from below.

Dermis: the middle layer. This is made of collagen and elastic tissue. There are blood vessels and nerves which are important to supply the epidermis (outer layer) with nutrients, regulate temperature and provide touch sensation. "Hair roots" are also held within this layer.

Subcutis: the deepest layer. It contains subcutaneous fat and muscle.



The three layers of the skin
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What is allergic or atopic dermatitis?

Allergic dermatitis is a general term given to itchy dogs that have inflammation of their skin caused by an allergy. Atopic dermatitis is a common cause of allergic dermatitis and is defined as a genetically predisposed inflammatory and pruritic (itchy) allergic skin disease often associated with a production of antibodies (IgE) against environmental allergens. It is characterised by chronic skin inflammation, pruritis and recurrent skin infections.

What can dogs be allergic to?

Allergies can develop via different sources:

- **Contact:** such as grass or other allergens causing a rash and itching on feet
- **Food:** often results in chronic skin disease in dogs
- **Environmental:** allergens in the air that are inhaled

When healthy, the skin acts as a barrier to protect itself and the rest of the body from injury and infection. Allergies create long term inflammation that results in the skin being unable to protect as effectively, weakening the barrier. This creates an increased risk of infection by bacteria or fungus.

What do allergies look like in dogs?

Itchy greyhounds may scratch, chew, lick or rub excessively. The skin may appear red and irritated, sometimes with areas of hair loss or the development of pimple-like spots, a rash or sores.

The most common sign that your dog has allergies is itching. They may also be more likely to develop:

- Dandruff
- Red, inflamed skin with or without a rash
- Poor quality or thin coat
- Recurrent ear infections
- Hot spots or other recurrent skin infections



A contact skin allergy in a greyhound

How do I treat my greyhound?

1. Parasite prevention

- Make sure you are up to date with a good quality flea treatment - some products may be ineffective due to the fleas having developed resistance so you may need to change product.

2. Treat any skin infection

- If mild, a medicated shampoo may be enough.
 - Washing with a medicated canine veterinary shampoo can help remove allergens, treat topical infections, reduce itching, soothe skin and strengthen the skin barrier.
- A course of antibiotics prescribed by your veterinarian may be required.
 - It is important to complete the prescribed course - incomplete treatment risks residual infection remaining within the skin or the bacteria becoming resistant to the antibiotic medication.
- Most of these products will contain antimicrobials or other anti-infective agents that are exempted substances, however it is best to confirm with your veterinarian if a product contains a prohibited substance.

3. Reduce inflammation

- Anti-inflammatory medication is required as this is the underlying cause, with the infection developing secondary to the inflammation.
- Apoquel and/or Cytopoint are now preferred over prednisolone for the treatment of allergic inflammation as they have a lower side-effect profile.

What medications are available to treat allergic or atopic skin disease

Apoquel (oclacitinib) and **Cytopoint** (lokivetmab) are relatively new immune modulating drugs designed to reduce the response of the dog's body that causes signs of allergies. They can be prescribed by your veterinarian if appropriate.

Form, method and frequency of administration:

| | Apoquel (oclacitinib) | Cytopoint (lokivetmab) |
|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Form | Tablet or chew | Injection |
| Frequency | 1-2 times daily | Every 4-6 weeks |
| Action | Anti-itch and anti-inflammatory | Anti-itch only |

As per GAR 138, **Apoquel** (oclacitinib) and **Cytopoint** (lokivetmab) are now exempted substances, so will not return a positive swab when prescribed appropriately for treatment of an appropriate chronic condition, however they must not be administered on race day, and as Cytopoint is an injectable substance, it must not be administered on the day prior to racing either (GAR 145).

Cyclosporin is also an exempted substance for the treatment of these conditions and for the treatment of pannus (superficial chronic keratitis). It is an immunosuppressive agent that works by reducing the production of cytokines and impairs the function of other inflammatory cells. It is administered orally daily until symptoms are controlled, and then reduced to the lowest effective maintenance dose.

Prednisolone is a prohibited substance subject to a threshold (GAR 140), and caution is required when administering for allergic skin disease, but it is effective in settling inflammation and itching. Greyhounds may be more sensitive to developing increased thirst and urination (and developing Water Diabetes Syndrome) when treated with corticosteroids such as prednisolone, particularly if high doses for extended periods of time.

There is no cure for allergies, and prevention is far easier than treatment of flare ups involving severe inflammation and skin infections. Therefore, once diagnosed, it is important to maintain routine monthly parasite prevention and ongoing appropriate treatment from your veterinarian which may include the administration of daily Apoquel or cyclosporin OR an injection of Cytopoint every 4-6 weeks by your regular veterinarian. It is important to have regular re-checks by your veterinarian to ensure that the frequency and dosage of treatment is correct, as over time it may change, such as flare ups necessitating an increased dosage in spring/summery.

As always, regular medications must be recorded for each individual dog in their treatment record. The recommended documentation can be found here:

<https://greyhoundcare.grv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/GRV-TREATMENT-RECORD-BOOK-FINAL-1-JULY-2024.pdf>

Further reading

- [Veterinary Fact Sheet – Frequently Asked Questions – Skin, hair and nails](#)
- [GRV Rules of Greyhound Racing](#)