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COMMON DISEASES OF PET HEDGEHOGS

What are some of the common diseases of pet hedgehogs?

Common conditions of pet hedgehogs include parasites, ringworm, cancer, and pneumonia.

What are the signs of these diseases?

Both internal and external parasites are seen in hedgehogs. Internal parasites ("worms" and protozoa) can cause diarrhea, (intestinal parasites), coughing (lungworms), or be diagnosed during the annual fecal examination in animals that are not showing symptoms.

External parasites that may be seen include fleas, ticks, mites, and cause various types of dermatitis or skin irritation. Mites are a common cause of skin problems. Clinical signs can include missing spines, hair loss, flaking and crusting of the skin.

Respiratory diseases, especially pneumonia, are often seen in pet hedgehogs. Nasal discharge, sneezing, and difficulty breathing may be seen. Severely affected pets may be lethargic and stop eating. One of the most common causes of pneumonia in hedgehogs is the bacterium *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, which causes kennel cough in dogs. It might be wise to limit contact between dogs and hedgehogs; all dogs in the house should be vaccinated against kennel cough.

Cancer often occurs in hedgehogs 3 years of age or older. Most commonly, the cancer involves the stomach or intestinal tract. As is true with many hedgehog diseases, clinical signs may not be specific for cancer and simply include lack of appetite and lethargy.

How are hedgehog diseases diagnosed?

Many clinical procedures can be performed on hedgehogs to allow for proper diagnosis just like in dogs and cats. These procedures can include a thorough physical examination, fecal analysis, radiographs (x-rays), blood testing, urine testing, cultures, ultrasound examinations, and exploratory surgery. Unlike dogs and cats, most hedgehogs must be anesthetized in order to properly perform these procedures. Using gas anesthesia like isoflurane gas is safe, quick, and allows the procedures to be properly performed without harming the pet or the veterinarian.

How are hedgehog diseases treated?

Internal parasites are treated with appropriate deworming medications. External parasites are treated with topical medications.

Pneumonia and other respiratory problems are treated with antibiotics. Hedgehogs that are lethargic and have stopped eating require hospitalization, fluid therapy, and force feeding when necessary.

It may be possible to surgically remove cancerous tumors. Those involving the internal organs are often too far advanced at the time of diagnosis to properly treat.

How can I tell if my hedgehog is sick?

Signs of disease in hedgehogs may be specific for a certain disease. Often, signs are vague and non-specific, such as a hedgehog with anorexia (lack of appetite) and lethargy, which can be seen with many diseases including pneumonia, overgrown teeth, cancer, and even kidney or liver failure. ANY deviation from normal behavior should be a cause for concern and requires immediate evaluation by the veterinarian.



Photo from <http://nursinglink.monster.com/news/articles/5764-doctors-no-hamsters-or-exotic-pets-for-young-kids>

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