Spring sunshine could spell trouble for pets as warmer weather welcomes allergy season

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I'm a veterinary advisor - and while many of us will be welcoming the warmer weather forecast across the UK, it could bring an unwelcome side effect for the nation's pets, as rising pollen levels trigger seasonal allergies.

Ronan Fitzgerald has revealed that the first stretch of mild spring weather often coincides with a spike in allergy symptoms in dogs and cats, as tree and grass pollen levels begin to climb.

Unlike humans, who typically experience sneezing and watery eyes during hay fever season, pets are more likely to show allergic reactions through skin problems, including persistent itching, redness and hair loss.

Ronan Fitzgerald, Veterinary Advisor at Protexin, the pet gut-health supplements brand, says allergies occur when animals become sensitive to substances in their environment.

"An allergy is a sensitivity to a substance that results in an immune response when the animal comes into contact with it," he said.

"Exposure to allergens can occur via the airways, skin or gut and although the signs of an allergic reaction might be obvious, for example, a cat or dog that appears to have itchy skin, identifying the cause can be challenging."

Dogs often first develop seasonal allergies between six months and four years of age, during the spring and summer months.

Symptoms usually involve itchy skin, redness, bumps and self-inflicted hair loss, with the face, ear flaps, tummy, armpits, groin and the skin between the toes commonly affected. Some dogs may also experience inflamed ear canals or recurring skin infections.

But it's not just dogs. Cats can also be affected, sometimes developing Feline Atopic Skin Syndrome (FASS), a type of allergy that affects the skin and can make cats extremely itchy. This can lead to hair loss from scratching, licking or biting the skin.

Some cats may also develop small crusty bumps known as miliary dermatitis, often noticeable when running a hand along their back.

Fitzgerald notes the way pets experience allergies is different from people.

"Unlike humans, where seasonal allergy commonly manifests as sneezing or rhinitis, for dogs and cats the important route for exposure to the allergens is via the skin.

"In cats and dogs with this type of allergy, their skin barrier is more vulnerable, and the coat can act as a reservoir of allergens, adding to the problem."

Common triggers include pollen, grasses, mould spores and insect bites, although parasites such as fleas can also play a major role in skin irritation.

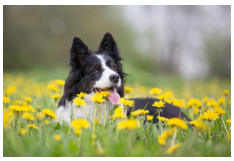
"Fleas are an important cause of itchy skin for cats and dogs and whilst a flea allergy can have a clear seasonal association, it can often be a year-round problem due to centrally heated homes," Fitzgerald shared.

He added that looking after a pet's overall health, including the balance of beneficial bacteria in the gut, can play a role in supporting their skin and immune system.

"There's growing research which is revealing a connection between the gut and the skin, meaning digestive health may also influence skin health and how pets respond to environmental triggers."

As with any changes to your pet's health, it's recommended that owners watch for persistent scratching, licking, inflamed skin or hair loss, and seek veterinary advice if symptoms continue.

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With warmer days on the way and more time spent outside, recognising the early signs of allergies and supporting pets' overall health will help them to be unstoppable from the inside and out.

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