

Vet and Pet Owner Perspectives on Canine Pruritus: A Global Survey



Merck Animal Health Global Survey Reveals Challenges in Treating Allergic Skin Disease in Dogs from Veterinarians and Owners: Findings highlight the importance of rapid onset treatment options and targeted treatments.

The recent Vet and Pet Owner Perspectives on Canine Pruritus: A Global Survey, conducted by Merck Animal Health, reveals challenges and pain points associated with diagnosing the underlying cause of allergic skin disease in dogs and its treatment. Veterinarians (N=302) and pet owners (N=306) within the U.S. were surveyed. The insights revealed notable differences in their preferences, priorities and motivations for treating allergic skin disease in dogs, while underscoring that both groups prioritize improving the quality of life of dogs.

Canine Allergic Skin Disease Is a Common Condition Among Dogs of All Ages

- One-third of canine patients seen by U.S. veterinarians have itchy skin or allergic skin disease. And about **2 in 5** are newly diagnosed.
- In the U.S., 67% of dogs with allergic skin disease are between 1 and 6 years old, while 14% are between 0 and 11 months old.
- Nearly half of allergic skin disease cases in the U.S. are considered moderate (49%).
 - Most cases in the U.S. are considered seasonal (45%), and over one-third (36%) are considered chronic.

U.S. Veterinarians and Dog Owners Feel Fatigued and Burdened by Canine Allergic Skin Disease

- 34% of U.S. dog owners report a notable negative impact on their own quality of life, and **43% of U.S. dog owners report a notable negative impact on their dog's quality of life.**
- 86% of U.S. dog owners who have taken their dog with scratchy/itchy skin to the vet have discussed their dog's itch with their vet, and 61% of those dog owners specifically made appointments with their veterinarian to discuss their pet's itchy skin.
- The survey findings indicate both dog owners and veterinarians have difficulty finding effective treatment. **28% of U.S. owners and 36% of U.S. veterinarians switched therapies** used to treat allergic skin disease within the last year.

When Selecting Antipruritic Therapies for Their Dogs, the Top Three Features U.S. Owners Look for Are Efficacy, Safety and Specifically Targeting Itch

- When asked to select the features they felt are most important in a treatment for their itchy dog, owners in the U.S. ranked effectiveness for itch as most important, safety profile as second most important and targeted for itch as third most important in the highest tier of relative importance.
 - U.S. veterinarians ranked effectiveness and rapid onset as the most important features.

Despite listing safety and efficacy as a feature of most importance, antihistamines and corticosteroids use remains high among U.S. dog owners

- In dogs, antihistamines can cause drowsiness or hyperactivity, long-term or high-dose corticosteroids can lead to serious issues like immune suppression, vomiting, diarrhea, and Cushing's disease.
 - Yet, 41% of U.S. dog owners report having used antihistamines to treat canine allergic skin disease in the last year, while 23% report using corticosteroids.** Fifteen percent report using oral tablet JAK inhibitors, and 8% report using monoclonal antibodies, which typically have fewer safety concerns and side effects.¹
 - Comparatively, more U.S. veterinarians reported recommending oral tablet JAK inhibitors (69%) and monoclonal antibodies (71%) as first-line treatment than antihistamines (43%) and corticosteroids (31%).
 - For treatments used concomitantly with other prescription treatments, nearly all U.S. veterinarians reported recommending parasiticides and medicated shampoos in the last year. These were the most common other treatments used by U.S. dog owners in the last year as well.

U.S. dog owners and veterinarians' satisfaction with treatment options also varied.

- Nearly a third of U.S. veterinarians (30%) were less than fully satisfied with oral tablet JAK inhibitors and a quarter (25%) were less than fully satisfied with monoclonal antibodies.
- More than half of U.S. veterinarians (69%) were less than fully satisfied with corticosteroids. Nearly all U.S. veterinarians (98%) were less than fully satisfied with antihistamines.
- Similarly, nearly a quarter of U.S. dog owners were less than fully satisfied with oral tablet JAK inhibitors and monoclonal antibodies (24% and 22%, respectively).
- Over a third of U.S. dog owners were less than fully satisfied with corticosteroids and antihistamines (35% and 34%, respectively).

U.S. Veterinarians and Dog Owners Are Aligned in Reasons to Stop Using an Antipruritic Treatment and Motivations to Start Using a Different Treatment

Around 1 in 3 U.S. dog owners and U.S. veterinarians reported switching treatments within the last year. Among both groups, the top reasons for stopping use of an antipruritic treatment were lack of efficacy and safety concerns.

- For U.S. dog owners, the top reasons they discontinued use of antipruritic treatment were because the product was not as effective as they'd like it to be (32%), the product was too costly/expensive (28%), they had safety concerns (21%), and one dose did not last long enough (21%).
- For U.S. veterinarians, 44% cited poor efficacy, 38% cited less targeted treatment, and 28% cited poor safety profile.
- While U.S. dog owners and veterinarians were aligned, global dog owners differed with top reasons being poor efficacy (22%), slow to start (20%), and my dog did not enjoy receiving it (18%).



For the U.S. dog owners who did switch treatments in the last year, the top reasons to start using a new product were recommended by veterinary staff (40%), safer for my dog (38%), and easier to administer or apply to my dog (35%).

- U.S. dog owners who had not switched treatments in the last year said they would be motivated to do so if the new treatment was a product that works better (47%), it was recommended by their veterinarian (39%), a product that works more quickly (37%).
- Reasons why U.S. veterinarians started recommending a treatment were: better efficacy (46%), innovative treatment that adds to the toolbox (44%), better client compliance (28%), more targeted treatment (26%) and price (26%).

When asked about unmet needs in current antipruritic treatments, more than half of veterinarians said there was a gap in cost effective, more affordable options.

- 52% of U.S. veterinarians said the top unmet need for canine antipruritic treatment is more cost-effective options.
- **Additionally, about 1 in 10 veterinarians globally (6% of U.S. veterinarians) said medication for dogs 6 months of age or older was an unmet need.** 13% of dogs with allergic skin conditions seen by veterinarians worldwide were 6 to 11 months old (9% in the U.S.), and therefore too young to receive a JAK inhibitor that is approved for dogs 12 months and older.



Survey Results Suggest that Veterinarians and Dog Owners Need to Work Together to Find the Right Treatment for Dogs

- Additional research was conducted by Merck Animal Health, interviewing 60 veterinarians and 25 dog owners from across five countries, including 20 U.S. veterinarians and 15 U.S. dog owners. The qualitative findings suggest that both dog owners and veterinarians desire better communication and understanding of treatment plans and expectations.
- Due to the chronic nature and variability of canine allergic skin disease, veterinarians reported feeling fatigued going from patient to patient and re-explaining the condition. Veterinarians also reported that pet owners often misunderstand the chronic nature of the condition and how treatments work, thinking there is a “quick fix.” **Veterinarians interviewed said owner compliance is the number one battle**, and that lack of treatment response almost always results from lapses in administration.
- Dog owners interviewed reported being unclear about the differences between chronic, seasonal and acute canine allergic skin disease. **Many of the U.S. dog owners interviewed said they don’t get enough information or instruction about the condition, their treatment options or a dedicated treatment plan.** In terms of compliance, dog owners reported that price is the number one issue along with the persistency of treatment – many said they worry about affording treatment in the long-term, as there is no cure.
- These findings coincide with survey data from dog owners on their perceived helpfulness of tools and resources to manage canine allergic skin disease. 75% of U.S. dog owners rated information to read online to learn how to manage their dog’s scratching or itchy skin as very helpful. 75% of U.S. dog owners also rated new patient kits from their veterinarian as very helpful.
- While the findings show that both veterinarians and dog owners are frustrated with managing canine allergic skin disease, they also suggest that better communication and increased information sharing could improve compliance and satisfaction with treatment plans.



For more information, visit www.merck-animal-health.com/news-and-insights/featured-stories/itchsurvey

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Survey Methodology:

This quantitative study collected data through an online survey administered by a professional market research organization, adhering to global market research guidelines and codes of conduct. The study captured data from a representative sample of 1,413 companion animal veterinarians across 11 countries: the US, Canada, Australia, Japan, Brazil, Mexico, UK, France, Germany, Spain, and Poland. Data was also captured among a representative sample of 1,710 dog owners across 8 countries: the US, Canada, Australia, Mexico, UK, France, Germany, and Spain.

Qualifying dog owner participants were 18+ years of age, owned 1–4 dogs and were primary or shared decision makers regarding their dog’s healthcare. They had to own a dog that has exhibited or been treated for signs of atopic/allergic dermatitis in the past 12 months (includes both diagnosed and undiagnosed dogs). To reduce bias, participants affiliated with animal health companies or market research firms were excluded. The study targeted a representative sample of owner demographics, including geography, gender, age and household income. The survey took approximately 24 minutes to complete and was conducted from 20 February 2025 to 16 April 2025. Qualified respondents were asked about their dog’s condition, diagnosis, and impact of the disease, followed by a series of questions assessing treatment use, frequency of treatment, and perception of treatments. They were also asked to provide their thoughts on factors driving them to select a treatment, and factors that identify an ideal treatment, also to provide their opinions on a potential new product concept for allergic skin conditions. If a respondent had multiple dogs, they were asked to focus on the dog that has exhibited or been treated for signs of atopic/allergic dermatitis in the past 12 months.

Qualifying veterinarian participants were full-time veterinarians who personally see itchy/pruritic dogs including atopic dermatitis cases, had been practicing veterinary medicine for 2–40 years, were primary/co-decision makers regarding products recommended or prescribed at their practices.

The study targeted a representative mix of participant demographics, such as gender and age, and practice demographics, such as location, size and ownership type (corporate versus independent). Participants were excluded if they were competitively employed or serving in an advisory capacity to animal health, market research and/or pharmaceutical companies. The survey was fielded from 4 November 2024 to 13 January 2025. The vet survey was 38-minutes and the dog owner survey was 24-minutes. Qualified participants answered questions assessing their canine patient load with the disease, their approach to treatment of allergic skin conditions, their perceptions of treatments, and the key factors that drive their selection of treatments. They were also asked to provide their opinions on a potential new product concept for allergic skin conditions.

Responses were collected and reviewed in an anonymized format. Open, free-text responses were grouped according to subject. Analysis consisted of descriptive analytics.