



## Skin Mass Monitoring and Treatment Options

Noticing a lump or nodules on your pet's skin can be concerning. These concerns are legitimate because without further testing, it is unknown whether these masses could be cancerous. Masses or lumps on your pet's body are classified into one of three categories: sterile, infectious, or neoplastic (cancerous). Sterile masses are made up of cellular or acellular material that is not infectious or cancerous; examples include fatty tumors (lipomas), fluid-filled cysts, raised areas of inflammation, etc. Infectious masses are usually composed of bacterial or fungal agents and associated inflammatory cells created by your pet's body; examples include abscesses, fungal granulomas, pustules, etc. Neoplastic masses are composed of cancerous cells and are further classified as either benign or malignant; examples include perianal adenomas, mast cell tumors, squamous cell carcinomas, etc. Whenever you notice a lump on your pet, it is best to make an appointment with your veterinarian to have it evaluated. When a mass is identified on your pet, there are usually three different ways to approach the situation:

### Options for Mass Monitoring and Treatment:

#### 1. Surgical removal of the mass

- a. This is the gold standard in mass identification and treatment.
- b. Sending the entire mass or a portion of the mass (a biopsy specimen) to a veterinary pathologist for histopathology will help to identify the mass and its nature and lets the surgeon know if the mass was removed completely.
- c. Risks associated with this option – anesthetic reactions, post-surgical infections, the mass could grow back (sometimes larger than previously documented), etc.

#### 2. Fine Needle Aspirate (FNA) of the mass

- a. This procedure involves taking a needle and gently poking the mass "like a pin cushion" to collect cells from the mass. The cells are then transferred onto a slide, dried, stained, and evaluated under a microscope.
- b. Although this procedure often does not definitively identify the mass, it can alert your veterinarian to the presence of possible cancerous cells so that further decisions can be made concerning the mass. It helps your veterinarian to know whether the mass can be safely monitored for a period of time or if it should be surgically removed as soon as possible.
- c. This FNA sample can be mailed to a reference lab for evaluation by a veterinary pathologist as well, which will increase the information obtained from the sample and sometimes clearly identify the mass type.



- d. Risks associated with this option – the needle insertion can sometimes aggravate the mass or cause its cells to “seed” or spread into surrounding areas, rare skin infections at the FNA site, etc.

### 3. Continuing to monitor the mass at home

- a. If the mass is not attached to deeper structures or painful to the touch, is soft and movable, relatively small, etc. then monitoring the mass for a period of time may be acceptable.
- b. This option is generally not recommended for masses located in the oral cavity, mammary glands, or on the digits.
- c. Signs to monitor the mass for would include growth (doubles in size in less than a month), hair loss, discharge from the mass, bleeding or ulceration, color changes, etc. If any of these signs are noted, then a recheck appointment with your veterinarian is warranted.
- d. Risks associated with this option – delaying surgical removal of the mass could lead to spread of a potentially cancerous mass, exponential growth of the mass during the monitoring period may limit the surgeon’s ability to remove the mass when needed or significantly increase the amount of surgical time required to remove the mass (subsequently increasing the anesthetic risk and cost of the surgery), etc.

If you notice a mass on your pet or have questions regarding the treatment or monitoring options, please give us a call today!