

## Introduction

A Mast cell tumour is a cancer arising from mast cells. Normal mast cells are part of the immune system and play a role in allergies as well as parasite control.

When cancerous they commonly occur in the skin and subcutaneous tissue and account for 20-25% of all skin tumours in dogs.

**Breed predilection:** Staffies, Boxers, Boston terriers  
Cats can be affected, especially Siamese

They are normally seen in dogs from 8 years of age but have been reported in dogs younger than 1 year old!

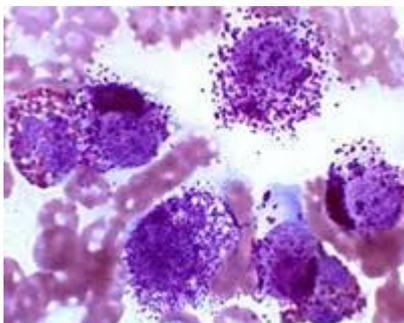
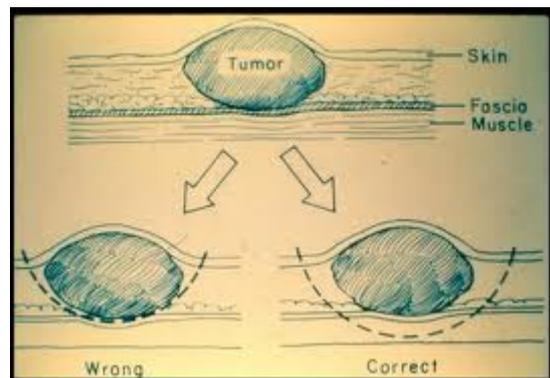
A dog may have had the skin tumour for days or months and it may have appeared to fluctuate in size or have recent rapid growth. Often there is a recent onset of redness and swelling at the tumour site.

A mast cell tumour can be extremely variable in appearance. They are normally round, pink, raised and hairless. However they can resemble any other type of skin or subcutaneous tumour (benign and malignant) and even resemble an insect bite or allergic reaction.

A mast cell tumour may occur anywhere on the body, sometimes local lymph nodes can be swollen or even the spleen or liver can be affected.

The causes of mast cell tumours are unknown.

Once we have determined that we are dealing with a mast cell tumour, the next step is surgical removal of the tumour. Due to the nature of mast cell tumours we need to be aggressive in our approach. This means we need to excise a large area around the visible tumour 3 dimensionally so as to ensure no tumour cells are left at the site. And as the surgical scar will be substantially larger than the original mass, sometimes plastic surgery is needed to close the wound.



To obtain a diagnosis a vet will usually use a needle to get some cells to look at under the microscope.



We then send this whole mass to the laboratory for histopathology. There they determine:

1. The type of tumour (i.e. to diagnose positively whether this is a mast cell tumour or another type of tumour)
2. The grading of the tumour (i.e. grading the aggressiveness of the tumour)

High grade or multiple tumours can often be successfully controlled with a course of chemotherapy that we can do at the clinic. Dogs can also benefit from radiotherapy at a specialist in Brisbane.

**This is by no means a comprehensive information sheet.**

**Please don't hesitate to contact your vet for more information.**