

Primary Secretory Otitis Media

Also Known As: Otitis Media with Effusion

Transmission or Cause: An association exists between PSOM, which is the formation of a sterile mucus plug in the middle ear, and the brachycephalic conformation. Anatomic changes in the nasopharynx of brachycephalic breeds may impair drainage of the auditory tube and increase the risk of PSOM.

Affected Animals: The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel seems to be overrepresented but PSOM has been identified in other breeds, including Boxers, French bulldogs, a Shih tzu and a Dachshund. Clinical signs generally present in dogs between 3 and 7 years of age, but has been reported in dogs between 2 and 8 years.

Clinical Signs: Clinical signs vary with dogs showing a possible myriad of signs such as head and neck pain, neck scratching, spontaneous vocalization, abnormal yawning, neurological signs such as facial paralysis, head tilt or seizure, a guarded neck carriage, itchy ears without infection, ear infections, and hearing impairment. Dogs may even show very subtle clinical signs or else the discovery of PSOM is sometimes made incidentally when screening for other conditions.

Diagnosis: A bulging pars flaccida, which is a component of the ear drum, is typically seen on otoscopic examination and is suggestive of PSOM. When a myringotomy is performed, a procedure in which a small hole is made in the ear drum so that the middle ear can be flushed, a mucus plug is present in the middle ear. For dogs who do not have a bulging pars flaccida, diagnosis can be made with diagnostic imaging, such as a CT scan or MRI.

Treatment: Treatment involves performing a myringotomy, a procedure in which a small hole is made in the ear drum and the mucus plug is flushed out of the middle ear. Post myringotomy, dogs are placed on topical and/or systemic steroids. Additionally, some dogs are placed on systemic antibiotics or mucolytics, such as acetylcysteine. Despite these therapies, relapses commonly occur. The placement of tympanostomy tubes may also be an option for treatment, but this requires special equipment and training.

Prognosis: Prognosis is good for these dogs; unfortunately, relapses post treatment are common. Many dogs require recurrent procedures.