CLIENT EDUCATION
Successfully managing the pet's itchy condition includes discussing with the owners the diagnosis and treatment plan.

FROM THE FIELD

Allergic Dermatitis in Canines and Felines

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From the Field shares insights from **Banfield Pet Hospital** veterinary team members. Drawing from the nationwide practice's extensive research, as well as findings from its electronic veterinary medical records database and more than 8 million annual pet visits, this column is intended to explore topics and spark conversations relevant to veterinary practices that ultimately help create a better world for pets.

The itchy pet. These 3 words probably bring at least 1 pet patient immediately to mind. Unfortunately, these pets are not uncommon. Given that these cases can be misunderstood by and frustrate pet owners, we focused Banfield Pet Hospital's 2018 *State of Pet Health® Report* on the 3 common allergic dermatitis conditions: food, flea, and atopy. The largest of its kind, our 8th *State of Pet Health Report* was generated using the electronic medical data from the more than 3 million canines and felines cared for at our hospitals in 2017.

It likely won't surprise you that approximately 7% of canine and 4% of feline visits to Banfield hospitals in 2017 resulted in a skin-related diagnosis. Some of these cases are relatively easy to diagnose and manage—for example, fleas, seborrhea, and skin trauma. As veterinary professionals, we know all too well that others can be more complex and challenging, both for the owner and the veterinary team.

Among these cases are the allergic dermatitis cases. Unfortunately, allergic dermatitis can clinically present like other skin conditions, such as ectoparasites, and bacterial, yeast, or fungal infections. With the plethora of information available these days through venues such as the internet, many pet owners turn to online resources for information on pet itching and what's considered "normal" for a breed, and to purchase off-the-shelf products, only consulting with their veterinarian when the problem persists or worsens. It can be difficult for pet owners to discern what sources are reputable and which information is substantiated. This year's *State of Pet Health Report* focused on the allergic dermatitis conditions to provide owners some clarity, including myth-busting common misinformation pet owners may have read or heard.

Many people are increasingly aware of food allergies in humans. Reasonably so, this is causing increased concern about food allergies in pets. As veterinary professionals, it's not uncommon to encounter the pet owner who is convinced their pet has food allergies and who has already tried several over-the-counter or homemade diets to relieve their pet's condition.

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Fleas remain the most commonly found ectoparasite in pets, with felines twice as likely as canines to be affected.

However, we found food allergies to be very uncommon, with less than 1% of canines and felines diagnosed with them (TABLE 1), which emphasizes the importance of ruling out other conditions that can have similar clinical presentation before exploring diet trials.

In addition, it is recognized in veterinary medicine that pets with allergic dermatitis conditions are more likely to have pyoderma or other skin conditions as a comorbid condition. Banfield data revealed that, of those with food allergies, canines are 6 times and felines are 15 times more likely to also be diagnosed with pyoderma. While there is increased risk, don't assume all allergic dermatitis pets require antibiotic therapy. This is only indicated when diagnostic testing demonstrates an active skin infection. As veterinary professionals, we are stewards for responsible use of antibiotics in pets to reduce risks of antimicrobial resistance, which can make these medications ineffective during future illness.

Pets diagnosed with flea allergic dermatitis, on the other hand, are common (TABLE 1). Fleas remain the most commonly found ectoparasite in pets, with felines twice as likely as canines to be affected. Given the prevalence of fleas in the feline population was 9.3% (versus 4.5% in canines)[1] and the number of effective flea control products available, this suggests further client education on the use of one of these products is needed. There are several reasons for this increased prevalence of fleas in felines, including some pet owners not recognizing fleas can be a year-round problem in their homes and that indoor felines can still be exposed to fleas by other pets, their owners, or visitors. Given that felines are fastidious creatures, many owners may not see fleas on their pet; therefore, they may not realize the pet has been exposed to fleas until the clinical signs manifest and treatment with a flea control product is underway.

Similar to flea allergy, atopy is more common, particularly in canines (TABLE 1). Its prevalence represents 30% and 11% increases of atopy in dogs and cats, respectively, over the last decade (FIGURE 1). Although the reasons remain unknown, this could be due to a number of factors, including increased awareness due to new, effective therapies brought to market in recent years. Our 2018 report provides educational information for pet owners to help them better understand that the inciting agents are similar to the common environmental allergens for humans. Just as in humans, identification of the environmental allergens can help owners reduce exposure when possible and pursue more specific treatment such as immunotherapy.

A LIFELONG COMMITMENT

Treating itchy pets can be resource- and time-consuming, frustrating pet owners and veterinary teams. Proper diagnosis of the pet's skin condition is key to ensuring that the pet is receiving appropriate treatment. Equally important is clearly setting pet owner expectations about the management of these conditions, which can range from relatively easy to quite complex, with some diagnostic tests (and treatments) being repeated and some patients referred to a veterinary dermatologist. Management of allergic dermatitis is a lifelong commitment, and as veterinarians, we need to partner with pet owners by remaining alert to the onset of clinical signs that indicate a flare-up. The earlier these are detected, the better for the pet's wellbeing.

Our *State of Pet Health Report*'s primary goal is to raise awareness among pet owners of the need for regular preventive care and emphasize the role of veterinary care. This year's report focused on client education to better understand these skin conditions, debunk common myths about itchy pets, and lay the groundwork for conversations with their veterinarians about how to approach treatment. As veterinary professionals, we know that client education and communication are the key components to pets

TABLE 1 Prevalence of Allergic Dermatitis Conditions in Canines and Felines Seen at Banfield Pet Hospital in 2017

	CANINE	FELINE
Food allergy	0.2%	0.1%
Flea allergy	1.8%	2.0%
Atopy	3.6%	0.4%

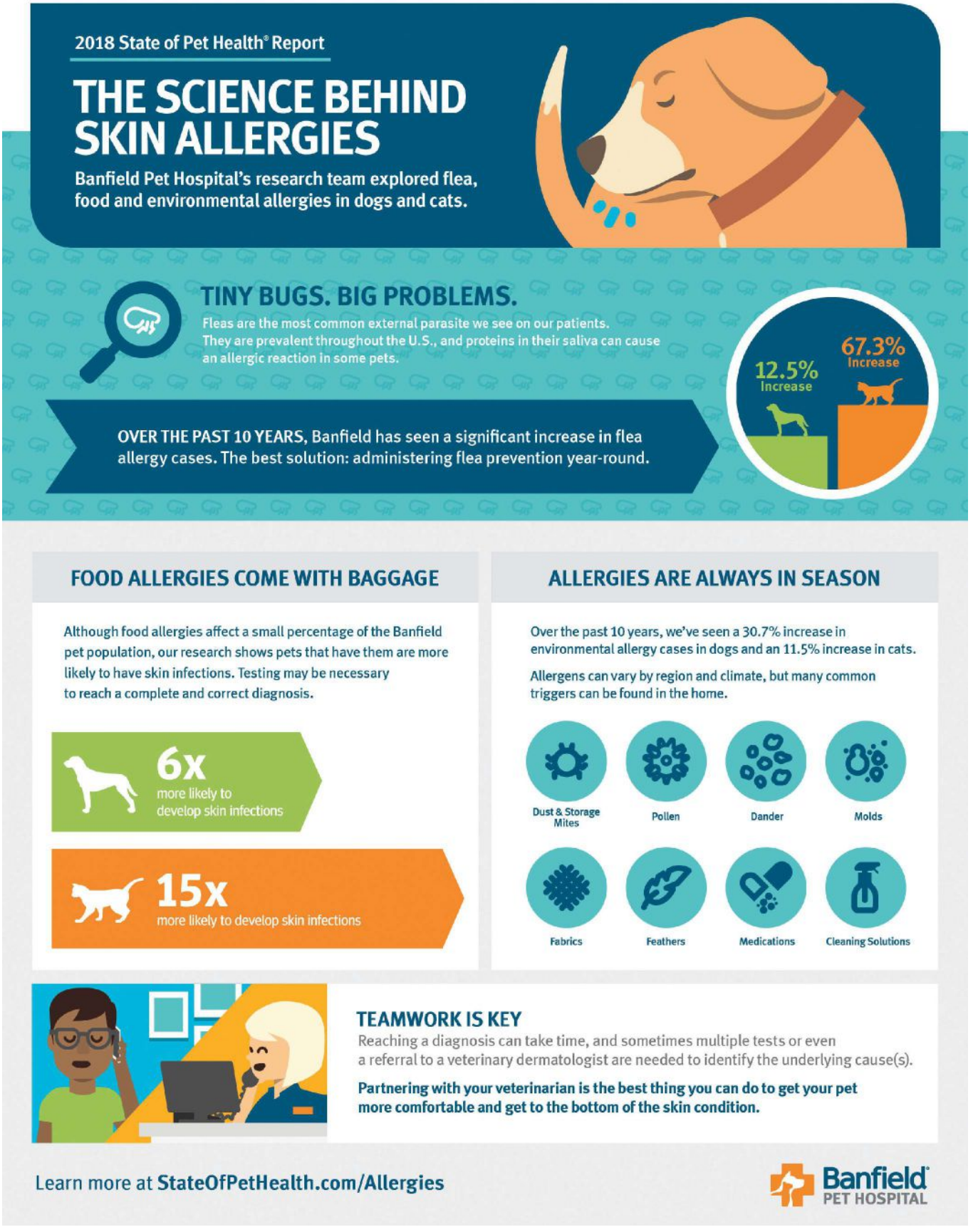
2018 State of Pet Health® Report
THE SCIENCE BEHIND SKIN ALLERGIES
Banfield Pet Hospital's research team explored flea, food and environmental allergies in dogs and cats.
TINY BUGS. BIG PROBLEMS.
Fleas are the most common external parasite we see on our patients. They are prevalent throughout the U.S., and proteins in their saliva can cause an allergic reaction in some pets.
OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS, Banfield has seen a significant increase in flea allergy cases. The best solution: administering flea prevention year-round.
12.5% Increase
67.3% Increase
FOOD ALLERGIES COME WITH BAGGAGE
Although food allergies affect a small percentage of the Banfield pet population, our research shows pets that have them are more likely to have skin infections. Testing may be necessary to reach a complete and correct diagnosis.
6x more likely to develop skin infections
15x more likely to develop skin infections
ALLERGIES ARE ALWAYS IN SEASON
Over the past 10 years, we've seen a 30.7% increase in environmental allergy cases in dogs and an 11.5% increase in cats.
Allergens can vary by region and climate, but many common triggers can be found in the home.
Dust & Storage Mites
Pollen
Dander
Molds
Fabrics
Feathers
Medications
Cleaning Solutions
TEAMWORK IS KEY
Reaching a diagnosis can take time, and sometimes multiple tests or even a referral to a veterinary dermatologist are needed to identify the underlying cause(s).
Partnering with your veterinarian is the best thing you can do to get your pet more comfortable and get to the bottom of the skin condition.
Learn more at StateOfPetHealth.com/Allergies
Banfield PET HOSPITAL

FIGURE 1.

receiving the best care and, therefore, the best outcomes. It is important that we remain up-to-date on the latest recommendations and treatment options, present a thorough diagnostic plan to ensure that treatment is addressing the right condition(s), set aside the time to get a thorough history (including what has already been tried), perform diagnostic tests, discuss with the owners the diagnosis and treatment plan, and set clear expectations for the immediate issue and the lifetime of the pet. These are the building blocks of a partnership between the client, pet, and veterinary team in managing the pet's itchy condition.

> Treating itchy pets can be resource- and time-consuming, frustrating pet owners and veterinary teams.

Visit stateofpethealth.com for more information on Banfield's *State of Pet Health Report*, including allergic dermatitis conditions, and to access client education tools. TVP

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Dr. Saito is a member of the Veterinary Affairs team at Banfield Pet Hospital's headquarters in Vancouver, Washington. As senior manager of Veterinary Research Programs, Dr. Saito leverages Banfield's electronic medical records to understand pet health trends and to improve patient outcomes by supporting Banfield's Medical Quality program. She is an alumnus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Pennsylvania, Emory University, and the University of Colorado and a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine. Her broad career history includes laboratory research, small animal practice, and animal health surveillance in a variety of animal species.

Reference

1. Banfield Pet Hospital's 2018 *State of Pet Health® Report.*

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