

FLEAS – SOLVING A FLEA PROBLEM

“Oh no! My pet has fleas!” “Why can’t I get rid of these fleas?” “My pet has never had fleas before!” “My pet isn’t itching, how can they have fleas?”

Fleas are a very successful parasite. They are tiny, dark brown insects that infest the coat and skin of pets. They can easily jump up to 150 times their own length, which allows them to move easily between hosts and the surrounding environment.

Is my pet at risk for fleas?

All pets are at risk for fleas. Even if your pet only goes outside to go to the bathroom it is still at risk for fleas. Even if your pet just sits next to the window, or goes into a breezeway, your pet is still at risk for fleas. All it takes is a single flea to gain access to your pet and an infestation can begin. If one pet has fleas, ALL pets in the environment are going to get fleas.

How do you tell if your pet has fleas?

Not all pets scratch when they have fleas. Only pets that are allergic to flea bites itch. These pets might be itching, chewing, scratching, losing fur, and have skin infections. You can use a flea comb to take a sample of your pet’s fur to look for evidence of fleas. You might find adult fleas or flea dirt (small black specks of grit) which is actually digested dried blood. If you’re not sure, put the black fleck on a moist, white paper towel and it will turn a reddish brown color after a few minutes.

How do pets get fleas?

Flea pupae can remain dormant for astonishingly long periods of time under a variety of conditions. Unfortunately there is nothing that can kill the pupae. Eggs and pupae can lay dormant in the garden, in your carpet, on the furniture, or anywhere an animal has been for months. An adult flea can stay alive without a blood meal in the environment for up to 100 days. They are waiting for a warm blooded animal to pass by so they can jump and find a blood meal to start the life cycle over again. Fleas jump great distances to find a host and travel on pets and even on people.

Why is it important to treat and prevent fleas?

Fleas are a major cause of skin disease in pets and can cause problems ranging from simple itchiness to weeping sores, scaly skin, hair loss, and a strong smell. Pets that are allergic to flea bites can experience itchy skin and infections for 3 weeks after a single flea bite. When a pet swallows a flea they can get tapeworms. Flea bites can transmit blood borne diseases, such as tularemia, bubonic plague, and bartonella. Fleas will also bite humans.

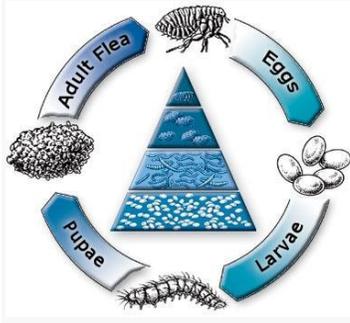
Why do you need to treat for fleas all year round?

Fleas are much easier to prevent than eliminate. We recommend year round flea prevention for all pets. The most effective method of flea control is to start before you see fleas. Fleas are not just a summer problem. Once you have fleas in the house, they do not die off in the winter. There are microenvironments where fleas are still living outside in the winter.

Why do fleas spread so quickly?

Fleas breed at an enormous rate. Each flea lays about 50 eggs per day. The fleas you see on your pet represent only 5-10% of the fleas in the environment. The rest of the population is represented in the egg, larval, and pupal stages found in your carpets, furniture, bedding and outside. The eggs are slippery and will drop off into the environment. They are landing everywhere that your pet is going.

The lifecycle of a flea



- **Adult Fleas** - jump onto your dog or cat, feed on its blood and then start laying eggs within 36-48 hours.
- **Eggs** - one female lays up to 50 eggs per day, they drop off in carpets and bedding before hatching.
- **Larvae** - the hatched eggs release larvae which move away from light, deeper into carpets and under furniture before developing into pupae. The larvae feed on organic debris and at this stage can consume tapeworm eggs, allowing them to become an intermediate host for the development of tapeworms.
- **Pupae** - the larvae spin a cocoon called a pupae, which is not able to be killed by any current methods. The pupae lie in wait for up to 9 months. They can be stimulated to hatch by warmth, movement, vibrations, and increased carbon dioxide. The newly emerged adult will erupt from the pupae, jump, and start biting.

This lifecycle can take as little as 2-3 weeks but can last up to 6 months or more. To rid your household from fleas, you must break this cycle.

How do you protect your pet from fleas?

A well-designed program is necessary to maintain a flea free environment, and prevention is definitely better than trying to get rid of fleas once you have an infestation. There are many different flea products available today. **We recommend flea prevention for all pets in the environment all year round.**

Options for Dogs:

1. Monthly Advantage Multi – this medication will kill fleas for 30 days. This product will deworm for roundworms, hookworms, and heartworms once per month. Give one tablet once per month all year round. This product does NOT treat or prevent ticks.
2. Bravecto – this medication is given by mouth and will kill fleas and ticks for 12 weeks.
3. Vectra 3D – this topical medication is applied to the skin every 30 days. It will kill and help repel fleas, ticks, biting flies, and mosquitoes.

Options for Cats:

1. Revolution Plus – this topical medication is applied once per month. It kills fleas and ticks for 30 days. This product will deworm the cat once per month for heartworms and roundworms. It also kills ear mites.
2. Catego – this topical medication is applied once per month and kills fleas and ticks for 30 days.

Environmental Treatments:

- In severe infestations, it is sometimes necessary to treat both the pet and the environment. An ideal product is a directed area spray that kills adult fleas **and** has an insect growth regulator (IGR) to help prevent the eggs from hatching and the larvae from developing. Remember, nothing kills the pupae.
- Once an active infestation is occurring, it can take up to 6 months for all of the pupae to hatch. During that time, ALL animals in the environment must be treated with good, effective flea control WITHOUT interruption for 6 months to prevent even a single flea from starting the life cycle over.
- Other control strategies: Vacuum carpets, floors, and furniture 3-4 times a week to remove eggs and stimulate dormant fleas. Make sure to empty the bag or canister. Wash pet blankets weekly in hot water and dry on high heat.

The best solution for your situation

Our veterinary and nursing team are fully trained in flea management and can assist you in choosing the products most suitable for your pets.

Fast flea facts

- Flea fossils date back to the Lower Cretaceous period, meaning fleas have been around for about 100 million years. At that time, their neighbors might have been a Tyrannosaurus Rex or Triceratops
- Some fleas can jump 150 times their own length. That compares to a human jumping 300 metres. One flea broke a record with a four-foot vertical jump.
- Undisturbed and without a blood meal, a flea can live more than 100 days. On average, they live two to three months.
- Female fleas cannot lay eggs until after their first blood meal and begin to lay eggs within 36-48 hours after that meal.
- The female flea can lay 2,000 eggs in her lifetime
- The female flea consumes 15 times her own body weight in blood daily.
- While adult fleas all suck blood from a cat or dog or other mammal, their larvae live and feed on organic debris in the host animal's environment.
- Flea larvae are blind.
- If you happen to see one flea, there may be more than 100 offspring or adults looming nearby in furniture, corners, cracks, carpet or on your pet.
- Fleas are often confused with bedbugs, lice and ticks.
- The largest recorded flea is the North American *Hystrichopsylla schefferi*, measuring 12mm in length - almost 1/2-inch!