

Hot Topic: Fleas

Fleas: old problem, new ideas

There are many different species of flea in the world but the most common ones we see on our pets are 'cat fleas'. Fleas like to live in warm, moist environments sheltered from direct sunlight. Fleas suck blood from the host animal with their special saliva that makes it easy for them to penetrate the skin for feeding. The saliva of the fleas is what causes irritation and allergic reaction, which in severe cases can lead to **flea allergy dermatitis (FAD)**. Fleas are not just an itchy nuisance; flea larvae can eat tapeworm eggs, and adult fleas may be carrying the tapeworm. If your pet swallows an infested flea while grooming, they can get infested with tapeworms as well (the same applies to humans who accidentally ingest fleas while interacting with their pets!). In this article we'll look into the biology of fleas and how we can apply that knowledge in effectively getting rid of them.

Life-cycle of fleas

Fleas have four stages of their life cycle: eggs, larvae, pupae and adults. The total flea life cycle can range from two weeks up to six months depending on environmental conditions. Young adult fleas are stimulated to hatch from the pupae by movement, shadows, body temperature of your pet and even exhaled carbon dioxide. The adult fleas then, within seconds, jump onto your pet and start feeding straight away. After 8-24 hours, they are ready to mate and start laying eggs within 24-48 hours. One female flea is said to be capable of producing 50 eggs a day - up to 2000 in her lifetime. They are laid on the pet's fur but then drop off into the environment, as they are smooth and non-sticky. When the eggs hatch, the larvae feed not on fresh blood like the adult fleas but rather skin cells, flea droppings (adult flea's faeces consisting of digested blood) and other organic debris in the environment. After a week or two, larvae form the cocoons and they can remain dormant anywhere between one week up to a year in the pupal form. What this means is that the fleas you see on your dog or cat represent only 5% of the entire flea population and that the other 95% (eggs, pupae and larvae) are actually in your pet's environment.

5 Tips on effective flea control

- Treat your **pets** and their **environment** simultaneously (treat all of your pets at the same time even if others are not showing any signs of fleas on them)
- **Bathing** and using a **flea comb** is also a good way to remove fleas but make sure to follow instructions when using topical flea control products as to how long to wait before or after bathing your pets.
- **Vacuum** your home thoroughly on a very regular basis. The vibrations from the vacuum cleaner can actually encourage the pupae to hatch so make sure you empty the vacuum cleaner regularly as well (changing the bag or emptying the canister).
- **Wash** the towels or blankets your pet sleeps on with hot water and dry in the sun weekly.
- **Mow** your lawn and rake any leaves or other plant debris from the yard. This will reduce the type of environment that pupae like to live in.

Flea products

Spot-On treatments – very effective, easy to apply and generally once a month application. Popular products include Advantage, Frontline, Advantix, Advocate and Revolution.

Tablets – Effective and easy to administer. Comfortis, Panoramis, Capstar.

Flea shampoos – kills fleas on your pet at the time but once rinsed off, has no protective property against new fleas that are ready to jump on your pet

Rinses and sprays – vary in effectiveness and does not last very long so need to be applied very regularly

Collars and powders – cheap and helpful but not the most effective treatment.

If your pet has just 10 female fleas for a month, with simple math they can potentially get close to a quarter of a million fleas! It's never too late to start flea control, get them under control today.

Call us and see what products are best for your pets :)