

FLEAS

PREVENTING FLEAS AND TICKS

Fleas are among the most common health problems of dogs and cats. In the long run, it is much easier and more cost-effective to prevent fleas on your pets than to have to treat a major infestation of fleas in your house. Regular use of flea products will take care of the occasional flea your pets may encounter in the yard and should prevent you from having to spend large sums of money on foggers and exterminators. Treating a bad flea infestation in your house usually costs upwards of \$150.

Fleas will bite your pets, causing an itchy allergic reaction, which can become quite severe. They carry viral and bacterial diseases. In small animals, especially puppies and kittens, the anemia they cause from feeding on the animal's blood can be fatal. They also carry tapeworms. Tapeworm segments in the stool or around the rectal area look like small grains of rice. If your dog or cat has fleas, chances are good he has tapeworms - and vice versa.

Wildlife, as well as other cats and dogs, bring fleas into your yard. Pets and people can then bring the fleas into the house. Birds nesting in the attic or mice seeking shelter can also bring fleas into your home. Fleas also travel on their own, as much as a mile an hour. They will hop inside through an open door or window and are often small enough to come through a window screen.

Once inside your home there is no place a flea cannot get to. Adult fleas spend most of their time on your pet, but the remainder of the time they are roaming your house and laying eggs - thousands of them!

If you've never been lucky enough to see a flea, they are about 1/8 inch long, reddish brown and shaped like a sesame seed with legs. They are usually found on your pet's head, belly or lower back. If you ripple the hair backwards and look at the skin they can be seen scurrying through the base of the haircoat. The droppings they leave behind can be seen in clusters. They look like grains of pepper.

If you place some of these on white paper toweling, wet it and mush it around it will turn the toweling red. This is because flea droppings contain digested blood. Plain dirt stays black or gray when wet.

Prevention

Fleas can usually be prevented by treating all pets who go outdoors so they don't bring reproducing fleas into the house. If you had fleas in previous years it may be wise to spray some insecticide in the house as well, especially on the ground floor near doors and windows. This will kill the occasional flea that hops in on its own.

Fleas have a little ball of an elastic substance called resilin, just above their hind legs. This elastic ball is what gives them their bounce and allows them to hop great heights and distances with little energy expenditure. A superball made of resilin, if dropped from a height of 100 feet, would bounce back up 97 feet. Scientists are studying resilin to see how it is made and what its structure is. At the present time, it's the most elastic substance known.

London's Natural History Museum contains a collection of souvenirs from 19th century Mexico of "dressed fleas" – tiny, meticulously dressed figures in little costumes, with fleas for heads.

Many flea products sold in grocery and discount stores are wasting your time and money. Some are even harmful to pets. Most compounds strong enough to be effective are sold only through licensed veterinarians and exterminators, who are properly trained in their use, and are regulated by the state and the EPA.

Brewer's yeast has not been shown in scientific studies to have any effect on fleas. However, it's a great source of B vitamins! Garlic is also ineffective against fleas.

One theory of historians says that lap dogs were bred, not for their company, but to distract the fleas into biting the dog instead of its owner.

For most of human history humans of all classes were routinely flea-bitten. In the words of one old poem the flea was: "Born to range the merry world/To rob at will the veins delectable of princes... To lie with ladies, and with fairest joy/On infants' necks to feed."

Insecticides should be used only according to label directions. Care is needed to ensure that toxicity does not develop due to the concurrent use of other drugs, pesticides or chemicals, or because the compound used was not safe for a particular age or type of animal.

Several different ointment type products are available for both dogs and cats. These products are applied to a small area of skin and spread over the whole pet themselves. Some kill ticks as well as fleas and they can remain effective for 1 - 2 months. Products available at your veterinary office are very safe and effective. Because they work so well they have almost eliminated

the need for messy flea baths and dips altogether.

Some people choose a long lasting flea spray to use on their pet to control fleas. New sprays are available that are waterproof for dogs who swim or are outdoors in the rain. Modern polymers enable some sprays to be effective for as long as 60 days.

Cats may prefer a flea mousse or powder. Cats often don't like the sound of spray. For both dogs and cats, it is best to treat the face and head by spraying a sponge or cloth and then wiping the spray on, avoiding the eyes.

Program © is an oral medication given to your dog or cat once a month. It circulates in the pet's bloodstream and is ingested by the flea when it bites the pet. The medication is a flea hormone, which will prevent the eggs that fleas lay from hatching out. This hormone has no effect on mammals so Program © has no side effects or contraindications. This same type of medication is also available in long lasting collars. Again, the medication makes it's way into the bloodstream and affects the flea when it bites the pet. (This is a different type of collar than the insecticidal ones available in stores.)

Also fairly new on the market is Sentinal © , a combination product with an oral growth regulator and a heartworm preventative together in one monthly pill. With both Program © and Sentinal © the pet has to get bitten by the flea for the product to work. You may still see the occasional flea on your pet, but these pests will lay sterile eggs, preventing the next generation of fleas. If your pet is allergic to flea bites (a very common problem) you may still need to use a spray or other insecticide to kill the adult fleas. The great thing about Program and Sentinel is that they WILL prevent your home from being infested.

Many insecticidal flea collars available in stores are not very effective and may cause dermatitis on the pet's neck. Flea shampoos and soaps are great for cleaning a dog or cat with fleas but they have no residual effect. They only kill fleas present on the pet at the time the bath is given. As soon as the animal dries off, fleas will hop right back on. For long term control you need a product that safely stays in or on the body for days or weeks at a time.

Safety is the operative word when it comes to flea products. Some products available on the market today are really new formulations of older chemicals that are not necessarily safe for your pet. Because these chemicals have been around for years they may not be as effective against fleas as the newer products. This is an important point as

well. Discuss the various choices in flea protection with your veterinarian – there's a lot to choose from.

When it comes to treating the home for fleas...

there are some relatively new products on the market which have changed the way we deal with fleas. These products are called growth regulators. They don't kill adult fleas but they break the life cycle by preventing flea eggs from hatching. Growth regulators are usually present in the house sprays and foggers sold at veterinary hospitals, to help break the fleas' life cycle as well as killing the adult fleas. [Click here for more information on treating your home for fleas.](#)

If you are considering beginning a flea or tick control program for your pets, please consult with your veterinary office. There are so many products on the market nowadays that it's tough to decide which ones are right for you. They are more than happy to help!

If a flea were the size of a human it could jump over St. Paul's Cathedral in London...not just once but 600 times an hour for three days in a row!

There is a flea species that parasitizes petrels that nest in Antarctica. These fleas spend 9 months out of the year encased in several feet of ice, waiting for the birds to return to the nesting grounds.