

Fleas are capable of reproducing with amazing speed. Each female flea is capable of laying nearly 2,000 eggs during their reproductive life. In order for a female to be reproductive they must take a blood meal from the host (your pet). Fleas begin laying eggs two days after a blood meal and egg production peaks by day four. Within a month, just 10 reproducing females can create a population of over 267,000 fleas.

Dogs and cats share the same fleas. It is important that all pets in your home are on a flea preventive. Treating your pet for fleas has never been easier. With the many choices we have today, we can provide you with the safest and most effective flea preventive for your pet's needs. When it comes to environmental control, we must first understand the flea life cycle.

There are four stages in the life cycle of the flea:

1. Flea eggs are whitish and about 0.5 mm (1/32") in length. They are unlikely to be seen without a magnifying glass. Eggs are laid by the adult flea after taking a blood meal. The eggs are initially laid on the dog's skin but fall off into the environment to continue their life cycle. Flea eggs constitute approximately 50% of the total flea population. Eggs may hatch in as little as 14 to 28 days, depending on environmental conditions. High humidity and temperature favour rapid hatching .
2. Flea larvae are about 2-5 mm (1/8 to 1/4") in length. They feed on organic debris found in their environment and on adult flea faeces. They dislike strong light and move deep into carpet fibres or under furniture, organic debris, grass, branches, leaves, soil, etc. Flea larvae prefer warm, dark and moist areas. Outdoor larval development occurs only in shaded moist areas where flea infested pets spend a significant amount of time. Our climate controlled homes offer an ideal envi-



ronment for the flea life cycle to thrive.

3. The flea pupae produce a protective silk-like cocoon which is sticky. It quickly becomes coated with grime and debris, which acts as a useful camouflage. With warmth and humidity, pupae become adult fleas in 5-10 days. The adults do not emerge from the cocoon unless stimulated by physical pressure, carbon dioxide or heat. This is important since once fleas emerge from the cocoon they can only exist for a few days unless they are able to feed. Pre-emerged adult fleas can survive within the cocoon for up to 9 months. During this time they are resistant to insecticides applied to the environment. This is important to remember because adult fleas may emerge into the environment a considerable time after you apply insecticides in your home.
4. Once emerged the flea adult, unlike the larvae, is attracted to light and emerges to the surface in order to encounter a passing host to feed upon. Two days after the first blood meal, female fleas begin egg production. In normal circumstances the adult female will live up to three weeks, laying approximately 40 eggs per day. The entire life cycle, from egg to adult flea can be completed in 14-28 days depending on environmental conditions.

### Apart from irritation, are fleas particularly harmful?

Fleas can cause anaemia, especially in young or debilitated dogs. A single female flea can take up to 15 times her body weight in blood over the several weeks of her adult life. In addition, fleas can carry

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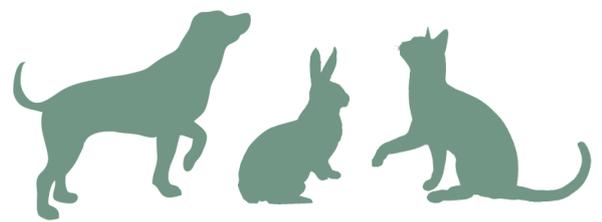
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several diseases and also act as vectors to spread one of the most common tapeworms of the dog and cat, *Dipylidium caninum* so it's important to worm your pet when you treat them for a flea problem. Fleas can be seen on your pet as small fast moving insects in your pet's hair coat. Sometimes you can only see the excrement ("flea dirt") which looks like ground pepper on the skin. This "flea dirt" is dried blood and will turn red if moistened.

Problems they cause to your pets; The obvious concern with fleas on our pets is the discomfort caused by constant itching and scratching. Some pets are more sensitive to the bite of a flea than others.

One very common problem with fleas is "Allergic Flea bite Dermatitis". While we are all familiar with our pets scratching because of fleas, to the allergic pet the problem goes much further than just scratching. These allergic pets are sensitive to the saliva of the flea. When the flea takes a blood meal it causes an intense allergic reaction in the skin of the pet. This reaction is due in part to the release of histamine in the skin. As a result the allergic pet becomes intensely "itchy." Allergic pets will often continue the scratch until they cause bleeding sores in their skin. These sores can subsequently become infected and cause your pet intense discomfort.

As mentioned earlier, fleas take blood meals in order to reproduce. As a consequence a large population of fleas can cause anaemia (loss of blood) in the infested pet. It is thought that one flea will consume one drop of blood each day. In a situation where an animal starts with 10 female fleas and ends up with 267,000 fleas by the end of the month (each consuming a drop of blood daily), it is easy to see that a pet can easily be overcome from blood loss. Fleas can also be responsible for the intestinal parasite Tapeworms in your pet. The tapeworm contracted by ingesting an infected flea. These worms are easily spotted as small white, rice size, worms in your pet's stool.

### What Should You Do?

Combating fleas requires a strategy. The fastest and most effective way to eliminate fleas is to treat the house, the yard and your pet. Remember that the pupae stage is very resistant to insecticides so you may need to retreat all areas about two weeks after the first treatment. **BE CERTAIN TO READ LABEL INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY.** Many chemicals can be toxic to cats, birds and aquarium fish so only use the appropriate product for specific applications.



### House, car and kennel:

1. Clean and vacuum living quarters well, especially where your pet sleeps. Dispose of vacuum cleaner bag outside immediately.
2. Sprays: (Indorex or RIP fleas)
3. Premise sprays work well for floors and under furniture. Read and follow directions carefully. Do NOT use premise sprays on your pets.
4. Treat the car and/or kennel if your dog goes in them.
5. Consider using a professional exterminator.

**Your Pet:** In the past few years many new products have been introduced to wage the war on fleas. These products have a distinct advantage over previous products. They are much safer for your pet and they have residual activity for a month or longer. Why not make an appointment to have a chat with one of our qualified nurses, to sort out a flea control program for your pet?

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