

Fleas

What is a flea?

Fleas are insects that live by feeding on the blood of animals and man. Those that bite dogs and cats will also bite humans.

Where do fleas live?

The adult flea lives on your dog or cat and feeds on their blood. The blood is necessary for the female flea to produce her eggs. Each day a female flea ingests about 15 times her body weight in blood and lays 25-50 eggs. The eggs are laid on the animal but soon fall off onto the ground or into your carpet, usually close to where your dog or cat spends most of its time. Depending on the temperature and humidity, flea eggs will hatch in 2-12 days. The larvae that emerge from the eggs have no legs and can only crawl a short distance. Therefore, most of them will be near your pet's favorite resting place. The flea can remain as a larva for 2-20 days and feeds on any organic material. After spinning a cocoon or pupa, the larvae changes into an adult; this may take 7 days to 1 year. The adult flea emerges from the pupa and jumps onto your pet to begin the life cycle all over again. Fleas can jump up to 13 inches and unless your pet dies, the fleas remain on the animal for life.

How do I know if my pet has fleas?

Your pet will be constantly scratching and biting itself as the feeding of the fleas causes irritation. You may observe the fleas moving through your pet's hair, see them on your carpet or be bitten yourself. A severe flea infestation can make a dog or cat a very miserable animal and can lead to allergic dermatitis and anemia. In addition, fleas can transmit tapeworm parasites to your pet.

How do I protect my pet from fleas?

Do not let the animal roam free. Besides being against the law in many communities, it simply allows your pet to come into contact with fleas from anywhere in the neighborhood.

A flea collar is good first step in protecting your pet provided you change it as recommended by the manufacturer (flea collars should never be worn around the ankles of people to keep away fleas as this can cause severe skin problems). The collar will kill adult fleas on your pet, but these may be replaced by newly hatching adult fleas from your pet's environment. Electronic flea collars do not work since fleas cannot hear ultrasonic sound and do not respond to it.

Your veterinarian may recommend a prescription flea control product. These products

are used every two weeks or monthly and either kill the adult flea or prevent the eggs from hatching. However, if your pet already has fleas then you will need to do more.

The most important step in protecting your pet is controlling fleas in the animal's environment.

What do I do if my pet has fleas?

Controlling fleas, especially in a severe case, requires patience. You can kill the fleas already on your pet with flea shampoos, wipes, dips, powders, mousse, foams or sprays. It is important to follow the label directions carefully. Products made for use on dogs may be harmful to your cat. Therefore, read labels carefully and use only the products approved for your pet.

A shampoo leaves no residual effect; once rinsed off, it no longer kills fleas. Dips are stronger chemicals and do leave a residual killing effect on your pet's hair. Dips cannot be used with all animals and you need to protect your skin when using a dip.

How can I keep fleas out of my house?

The only way you can keep fleas out of the house is to keep them off of your pet. But if you do find fleas on your pet one of the least expensive and most effective methods of controlling fleas in the house is to vacuum. Pay a lot of attention to areas where your pet spends the most time. Any bedding material used by your pet should either be washed or replaced. You could also spray these areas with products designed as spot killers.

Depending on how severe the flea problem is in the house, you may need to spray and fog the house. This involves spraying the whole house, including closets and under furniture and loose chair cushions; vacuuming twice then sealing and discarding the vacuum bag; and fogging in carpeted rooms with a product that will kill the adults and larvae. Repeat applications may be necessary. If you use foggers be sure to use enough and place them according to label directions. Remove all animals, fish and people from the house when fogging. Be sure to open up the house for at least 30 minutes before letting animals or people back inside. Shampoo/steam cleaning of carpets may help, however vacuuming is best.

How do I treat my yard?

Have your yard fenced to keep stray animals out. This will reduce the likelihood of fleas being brought into your yard. Keep your yard clean. The most cost effective "treatment" is to rake the leaves and remove brush piles. Fleas like damp, dark places, and in the heat of the summer so do your pets. Spot spraying the yard helps, although this must be redone after any rain. It is best to spot spray the dog house or pen, as well as your pet's favorite sleeping spots, on the same day that you treat your animal for fleas. If

fleas are a major problem, yard sprays are helpful. Again, use them on same day you treat your pet for fleas. You can incorporate a product that kills fleas into a regular lawn maintenance program.

Any garden/lawn supply business should be able to advise you on sprays for the yard or house. Remember to read and follow all label directions.