

Fleas On Your Dog Or Cat

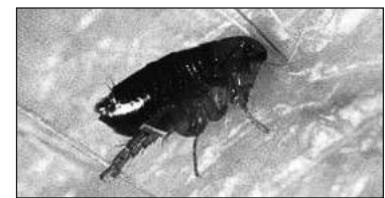
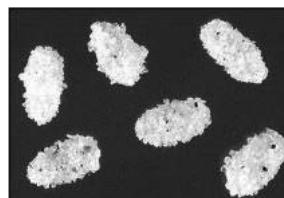
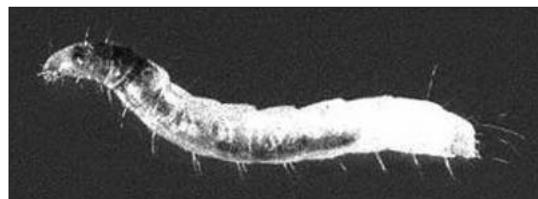
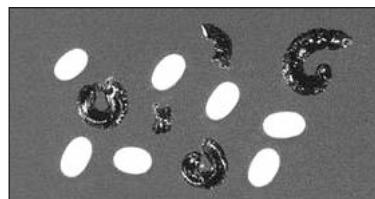
Important Facts About Fleas

- Adult fleas (the biting stage seen by pet owners) spend most of their time on the animal, not in the carpet. This is why treatment of the pet in conjunction with the pet's environment is essential in ridding a home of fleas.
- Adult fleas lay all of their eggs (up to 50 per day) on the pet. However, the eggs soon fall off the animal into carpeting, pet's bedding, beneath the cushions of furniture, and wherever else the pet rests, sleeps or spends most of its time. This is where homeowners should focus control measures.
- After hatching, flea eggs develop into tiny, worm-like larvae. Larvae remain hidden deep in carpet fibers, beneath furniture cushions and in other protected areas. The larvae feed mainly on adult flea feces (dried blood) which accumulates, along with the eggs, in pet resting and activity areas.
- Before becoming adult fleas, the larvae transform into pupae within a silk-like cocoon. Pupae remain inside the cocoon for 2 to 4 weeks, sometimes longer. The cocoon is resistant to insecticides and this is why some adult fleas are seen for an extended period, even after the home and pet are treated.
- Flea larvae develop more quickly at higher temperatures. At cool temperatures, fully formed fleas may remain in their cocoons for up to 12 months. Warm temperatures and mechanical pressure, caused by walking on the carpet, vacuuming, and so on, stimulate emergence from the cocoon. At room temperatures, the entire life cycle may be completed in about 18 days. An adult flea generally lives about 30 to 40 days on the host; it is the only stage that feeds on blood. Fleas may be found on pets throughout the year, but numbers tend to increase dramatically during spring and early summer.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH FLEAS

The flea is suspected of transmitting murine typhus to humans, but its primary importance is in its annoyance to people and pets. Fleas readily try to feed on almost any warm-blooded animal. Some people are bothered by the sensation of fleas walking on their skin, but bites are the major nuisance. Bites tend to be concentrated on the lower legs but can also occur on other parts of the body. The bite consists of a small, central red spot surrounded by a red halo, usually without excessive swelling. Flea bites usually cause minor itching but may become increasingly irritating to people with sensitive or reactive skin. Some people and pets suffer from flea bite allergic dermatitis, characterized by intense itching, hair loss, reddening of the skin, and secondary infection. Just one bite may initiate an allergic reaction, and itching may persist up to 5 days after the bite.

Fleas also serve as intermediary hosts of tapeworms. Cats or dogs may acquire this intestinal parasite while grooming themselves by ingesting adult fleas that contain a cyst of the tapeworm.



Top to bottom, left to right:
Flea eggs and feces; flea larva; flea cocoons; adult flea biting the host.
Photos by: James Castner,
University of Florida

MANAGEMENT

The best approach to managing fleas is prevention. New, safer, and more effective products aimed at controlling fleas on the pet have made flea management without pesticide sprays feasible in many situations. Management of fleas on the pet must be accompanied by regular, thorough cleaning of pet resting areas indoors and outside. Once fleas infest a home, control will require a vigilant program that includes cleaning and treating infested areas indoors, eliminating fleas on pets, and cleaning up and possibly treating shaded outdoor locations where pets rest.

Preferred On-pet Flea Treatment Products. New product innovations have made it possible to effectively, conveniently, and safely prevent fleas. These products are more effective and safer than the traditional insecticide dusts and sprays, which until a few years ago were the only choices for pet owners. The new products contain insect growth regulators and insect development inhibitors that must be administered orally and are available from veterinarians. These products work by either preventing the larvae from turning into adults or the eggs from hatching and are virtually nontoxic to pets and people. If properly applied before flea season begins and reapplied as necessary, any of these products can prevent a flea infestation.

Spot-on Formulations. Advantage® and Front-Line® are available from veterinarians and are applied to the animal's skin; a single application provides flea control for 1 to 3 months. These spray and spot-on formulations are much easier to use than baths and are more acceptable to the animal. A few drops of the spot-on formula applied to the animal's shoulder blades move through the animal's coat, providing whole-body treatment. Both products kill adult fleas within hours of the flea jumping on the animal. Also, these compounds have lower toxicity than traditionally used flea control products and are safer to use on pets.

Generally the spot-on formulations can withstand bathing; check the label for specific instructions.

Systemic Oral Treatments. Several flea control products are internal medications that are administered on a regular basis in the form of a pill or food additive. Newer products contain insect development inhibitors that do not have the toxicity of the older products and are much safer to use. The insect development inhibitor Program® can be given as a pill (dogs) or as a food additive (cats) once a month to suppress flea. It can also be administered as an injection every 6 months. While this compound does not kill adult fleas, it does prevent flea reproduction. If its use is initiated early in the year before flea populations begin to build, it can prevent the establishment of a flea population in the home, though an occasional adult flea may be sighted on the animal.

Flea Collars. Flea collars containing the insect growth regulators are virtually nontoxic to pets and humans and can be used on both cats and dogs. The growth regulator is released by the collar and distributed throughout the coat of the pet. Adult fleas coming in contact with the growth regulator absorb it into their bodies where it accumulates in their reproductive organs. Eggs laid by the adult female do not hatch. Flea collars may contain the insect growth regulator as the sole active ingredient or it may be combined with an insecticide. If the collar contains only the insect growth regulator, use another treatment, such as a spot-on product, to control adult fleas if necessary. **FLEA COLLARS ARE NOT RECOMMENDED AS THE PET CAN HAVE AN ALERGIC REACTION WHERE THE COLLAR TOUCHES THE SKIN AND THEY ARE NOT AS EFFECTIVE AS SPOT-ON FLEA CONTROL.**

Traditional Insecticide Products. Until recently, pet owners had to rely on products containing conventional insecticides to control fleas on their pets. These products were formulated as soaps, shampoos, powders, dusts, spray-on liquids, and dips. Although many of these products are still available, they are not as effective or as safe to use as the products listed above titled "Preferred On-pet Flea Treatment Products." Some products are not safe for some pets, such as permethrin products on some cats, and small children and infants should be kept away from animals treated with any of these materials.

Nonchemical Treatments. Special combs are available that help remove adult fleas from the coat of a shorthaired pet. Removing fleas may provide comfort to the animal and reduce flea breeding. Combing pets at regular intervals is also a good way to monitor the flea population and help you decide when other control measures are necessary.

Studies have shown that neither Vitamin B1 (thiamine hydrochloride) supplements nor brewer's yeast prevents fleas from feeding; also, herbal collars and ultrasonic devices are not effective flea repellents.

If you need further assistance go to www.petsforlife.org,
www.mobilespca.org or email the Mobile SPCA
at behavior@mobilespca.org



Mobile SPCA

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