



Fleas

Fleas are the most common parasite and cats and dogs, and one we are all familiar with. Although we may think our house is too clean for fleas, almost all pets will suffer a flea infestation at some stage - and the only way to prevent this is with regular flea treatment.

Why is flea treatment necessary?

Although many cats and dogs will live quite happily with fleas, and show no signs, many animals will develop a flea allergy and severe skin irritation from fleas - in fact fleas are the most common cause of skin disease in pets.

They will also bite people - especially around the wrists and ankles - often causing very itchy lumps.

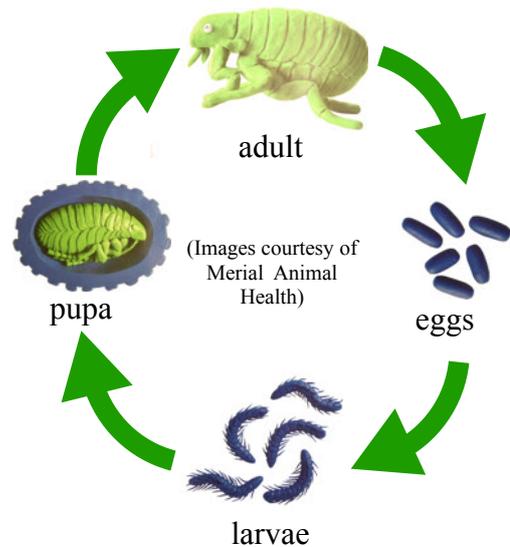
Fleas carry tapeworms - and so can act as a source of these parasites for dogs and cats.

Because fleas feed on blood, flea infestations can cause anaemia. With heavy infestations, particularly in young kittens and puppies, the anaemia can be fatal.

Fleas can also spread diseases such as myxomatosis in rabbits, and infectious anaemia in cats.



The flea life cycle



Flea facts

- An adult flea can lay 50 eggs a day.
- The eggs hatch into larvae, which live in dark cracks and crevices in the house - the backs of sofas, between floorboards, the edges of carpets.
- The pupa is resistant to all flea treatments.
- The flea life cycle can be completed in as little as two weeks - but fleas can also survive for up to two years.
- 95% of the fleas will be living in the house rather than on your pet.
- Although the main flea season is the summer, central heating means they can live and breed throughout the year.

A single flea can produce approximately two million offspring through the summer!



Has my pet got fleas?

You may see fleas crawling over your pet if you part the fur. However, cats and dogs will lick up and eat the fleas as they groom, so they may not be apparent. "Flea dirt", or dropping, may also be seen in the coat as black specks or "comma" shapes. If brushed off onto wet white paper, the flea dirt will dissolve to leave reddish brown spots.

Because itchy animals will groom more, they will often remove the evidence of fleas - hence in houses with several pets it may be easier to see the fleas or flea dirt on the pets without skin problems. Remember to look on both cats and dogs - and remember also that most of the fleas will be in the house, not on the pet.

Treating your pets

- Because of the difficulty of killing the pupa stage of the flea life cycle, getting rid of heavy infestations is very difficult, and regular treatment throughout the year to prevent infestations is preferable.
- It is important to treat all cats and dogs in the house.
- "Spot-on" refers to the means of applying a treatment, and not the ingredient - all "spot-ons" **are not the same**.
- The more recent, "prescription" flea treatments tend to be more effective, and to last longer.
- Using treatments which incorporate a growth inhibitor will help to control fleas in the house as well.
- As most of the fleas are in the house, treatment of a flea infestation should always include treatment of the house.



Treating the house

- Make sure the treatment is effective against the larval stages of the life cycle, as well as adults.
- Sprays are better than "bombs", as they can be directed towards the cracks and crevices where the flea larvae live.
- However, a single treatment may not be sufficient, as the flea pupae are resistant to treatment. Long lasting treatments will help overcome this problem.
- Hoovering before treatment will help - as the vibrations caused by the hoover stimulate the flea pupae to hatch.

Never use dog flea treatments on cats. They often contain permethrin, which is the most commonly reported cause of poisoning in cats, and can be fatal.