



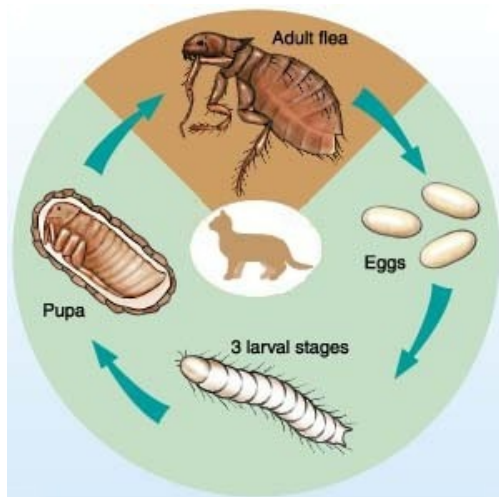
MANOR
VETERINARY CLINIC

Fleas



What they are and what to do about them

Fleas are small, reddish-brown insects with a complex life cycle, most of which takes place in the environment - not on your pet. The adult fleas on your pet represent the tip of the iceberg and there may be hundreds of immature fleas in your home, waiting to jump on board of a passing pet or on to you!



Flea life cycle

Adult female fleas can produce dozens of eggs each day. These are laid on the pet but are not sticky and fall off onto the floor where your pet walks and rests.

After a few days, these eggs hatch into larvae which hide in the carpets, cracks in the floor and your animal's bedding. They feed on dust and the droppings from adult fleas which consist mostly of undigested blood.

The larva then spin a cocoon and may stay resting as a pupa for several months until they hatch as an adult flea and jump on to a host.

The cycle can take just 2 weeks in late summer when conditions are warm and humid. Centrally heated homes provide an ideal environment for fleas to develop and allow survival over winter. Most adult fleas live for 2-3 months but young fleas can survive for over a year before reaching maturity and feeding on your pet.

Problems caused by fleas

Fleas are the most common cause of skin disease in dogs and cats. Flea saliva can cause an allergic reaction in your pet which causes itching. Affected animals lick or scratch themselves, wearing away the fur and making the skin sore. Sometimes a crusty rash may develop. Not all animals are affected by the flea saliva; some cats may have many fleas and show no signs, acting as carriers.

These allergies are worse in summer when flea populations are highest. Sensitive animals may only need a few flea bites before getting skin problems.

As fleas suck blood, very young or ill animals may suffer from anaemia if they have a high flea burden.

Fleas can also carry eggs of tapeworms such as *Dipylidium*, which grow inside your pet's intestine.

How can I tell if my pet has fleas?

You may see adult fleas running through your pet's coat as you groom them however they are very fast and good at hiding so they may not be observed.

The flea droppings in the coat are known as flea dirt. These appear black and can easily be distinguished from soil when brushed off of your pet onto wet white paper. The black dirt will turn reddish-brown, which is the dried blood in the droppings dissolving into the water.

Sometimes, there are no obvious signs of fleas if the animal grooms themselves and removes the fleas. The vet may want to take a blood sample to test for an allergy against flea saliva.

How to control fleas

It is important to control adult fleas on the pet and the immature fleas in the environment to ensure that your home is free from fleas. Just treating one or the other will result in the flea life cycle starting again.

1. Treat ALL pets in the household.

Fleas are incredibly adaptable so it is important to not only treat all cats and dogs in the house, but also other pets such as rabbits!

Topical treatments, applied to your pet, will kill adult fleas passing through the coat. Spot on products will spread through the skin and some products are applied as sprays. Shampoos and collars are available for flea control but these generally only kill fleas on the pet at the time of treatment and do not persist for very long, so have to be applied frequently and this is often inconvenient.

Flea collars containing insecticides are not very effective for controlling fleas. They only affect fleas close to the collar and so fleas may have already bitten elsewhere. In some animals, flea collars can cause allergic reactions and some cats may get caught up by a collar and strangled.

A selection of products for monthly flea control are listed below:

Frontline or Effipro (fipronil) - kills adult fleas and is available as a pump or spot on. The spray can be used on animals as young as 2 days old.

Frontline Combo - This has Fipronil as in the standard Frontline to kill adult fleas, but also has methoprene added which prevents immature fleas from developing into adults so can help to control an infestation faster than just the adulticide.

Advocate (imidocloprid and moxidectin)- As well as treating fleas, this spot-on has action against roundworm and some mites

Comfortis (spinosad)- A newly launched product, currently for dogs only. This is a tablet given in food which kills fleas very quickly and has the benefit of not being washed off so useful in dogs which swim or are bathed often.

Other flea control products:

Capstar (nitenpyram) - Kills adult fleas on pets within 30 minutes, but doesn't have any long lasting activity. Useful if your pet has a heavy flea burden.

Xeno (ivermectin) - spot on for small pets, including rabbits.

Program (lufenuron) - This is usually given monthly as a tablet or a 6-monthly injection. It stops the eggs laid by fleas from being able to develop. It does not kill adult fleas so an additional product must be used to do this.

2. Treat the environment

- Turn up the central heating and place wet towels on radiators to increase warmth and humidity and encourage flea eggs to hatch, then vacuum the whole house. This will remove some immature flea stages as well as removing debris that the larvae feed on. Dispose of the vacuum bags afterwards.
- Wash pet's bedding on a hot wash will kill young fleas (but not the eggs). Dispose of anything that is heavily infested.
- Next, use a chemical spray such as **Indorex** or **RIP Fleas** in the home. These products kill the adult fleas that have hatched out as well as containing chemicals to stop immature forms from developing. Concentrate on carpets, skirting boards, under furniture and anywhere the pet frequents. Don't forget cars and sheds!

3. Continue monthly preventative control

There may still be flea pupae present in the house even after treating the environment as they are resistant to insecticides while they are in their sticky cocoon. It may take a few months to control the flea infestation as the immature fleas need to hatch out and come into contact with the insecticides on your pet.

Regular flea control with the products recommended is important all year round, as fleas will survive the winter thanks to central heating. Use your diary or calendar to mark the dates when flea treatment is due - do not rely on your memory.

Remember - regular preventative control is easier than controlling an infestation!



MANOR
VETERINARY CLINIC

www.manorveterinaryclinic.co.uk



Written and illustrated by Megan Davies MA VetMB MRCVS, 2011.

Some content adapted from Vetstream including flea life cycle diagram

Manor Veterinary Clinic, Pent Road, Shearway Business Park, Folkestone, Kent CT19 4RH

Phone: 01303 273203 | Fax: 01303 271994 | Email: office@manorveterinaryclinic.co.uk