

FACT SHEET



FLEA PREVENTION & CONTROL

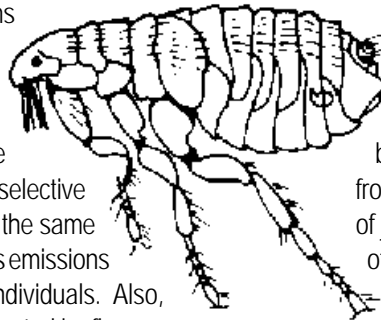
MEET THE PEST

Fleas are a common pest affecting many different types of animals including domestic pets. Although cats and dogs are the main host of fleas in the home, humans may also be affected by flea bites. Humans usually experience bites on the ankles and lower part of the legs. Each bite produces a small, hard, red spot with a noticeable puncture wound. Fleas may also carry and transmit various allergens and disease causing organisms which can be passed to humans and other animals when the fleas bite.

Fleas seem to be attracted to some people more than others. One reason for this selective attraction could be that not everyone has the same chemical makeup. Skin secretions and gas emissions such as carbon dioxide vary among individuals. Also, some people are allergic to the saliva secreted by fleas. A person with a moderate or severe allergic reaction may notice flea bites more than a person who is not allergic. The discomfort caused by flea bites can be reduced by applying an ice cube to the bite, or using menthol, camphor or calamine lotion.

LIFE CYCLE

Flea populations usually reach their peak in late summer (August, September) when the temperature and humidity rise. The life cycle of the flea consists of egg, larva, pupa and adult stages. Although the female flea only mates once, she can lay 25 eggs a day and produce several hundred eggs during her life. The tiny, round, white eggs are deposited singly on the skin or fur of the host (usually a cat or dog) after the female flea has had a blood meal. The loosely attached eggs



can easily fall from the host onto areas visited by the pet, including bedding and resting areas on carpets and furniture. When fleas are present, high numbers of eggs can usually be found in pet bedding or areas where the pet spends a lot of time. The eggs develop into hairy worm-like larvae. The larva feeds on organic debris until it pupates and develops into the adult flea. If conditions are unfavorable (e.g., if pets are out of the area for an extended period of time), fleas can remain in the pupal stage for several months until favorable conditions return. Adult fleas are small (1-4 mm), dark brown insects with bodies that are flattened from side to side. They are wingless but capable of jumping up to 0.5 m when disturbed. The legs of fleas are spiny and comb-like making it difficult to detach the fleas from the fur of pets.

1/16" MONITORING

It is easy to monitor fleas by watching your pet. If a pet seems to be scratching more often, chances are fleas are the culprit. You can check for the presence of fleas by combing your pet with a fine toothed flea comb. Pay special attention to areas around the head, neck and shoulders and base of the tail. Fleas may be present in higher numbers in these areas.

One way to determine if fleas are infesting your house or pet is to lay a white sheet over your pet's bedding and watch for jumping fleas. The fleas show up on white surfaces clearly. To determine flea location and population size, try wearing a pair of white socks and light coloured pants while walking in a suspected area of infestation. Again, the fleas will be attracted to the white colour and will be seen jumping at the ankles and legs. This method will work best if the pet has been absent from the dwelling for a short time.

CONTROL

Physical Control

Protect your pet from fleas by reducing flea breeding areas in and around the home. Popular pet visiting places in the home, especially pet bedding, can easily become infested. If fleas are a problem, limit the pet to specific areas of the house and wash these areas often. Vacuuming on a daily basis removes eggs, larvae and adults, thereby reducing flea numbers. In order to avoid re-infestation, be sure to destroy the vacuum bag when finished. Also pet bedding should be washed in hot soapy water every two or three weeks to remove flea eggs which may have fallen from the pet. In the case of severe infestations, old bedding should be discarded and replaced. Steam cleaning carpets and furniture where the pet lies will also limit flea populations.

Grooming pets is one of the easiest and safest ways to control fleas. Combing pets with a fine-toothed flea comb is a very effective way to remove flea eggs and adults. Concentrate on the areas around the head and neck of the pet and the base of the tail as this is where most of the fleas gather. Fleas caught in the comb can be killed by immersing them in soapy water. In the case of heavy infestations, a combination of physical and chemical controls are often required to control the problem.

Chemical Control

If physical measures are not effective to control an existing infestation, use a flea control product that will have a minimal impact on you, your pet and the environment. If it is necessary to use a pesticide, apply it only to infested areas. Some examples of pesticides include diatomaceous earth and silica aerogel dust formulations. Both work as abrasives. When fleas come in contact with them, they dehydrate and die. Sprays of boric acid and methoprene can also provide indoor control. Methoprene prevents flea eggs and juvenile fleas from developing into adults. It is considered to be of low toxicity to humans but will work against fleas for three to seven months. However, as it only affects the immature stages, existing adults and pupae will initially have to be controlled with the other methods listed in the physical or chemical control sections of this fact sheet. A new product, which is given orally to pets, is now available from veterinarians. This product controls flea infestation by interrupting the flea cycle at the egg and larval stage.

Flea collars and shampoos are often used during the summer when flea populations are at a peak. Flea collars prevent fleas from biting while shampoos will kill fleas on contact but provide little lasting control. If using these products, be sure to select a product that is appropriate for the type of pet that you have. Using a dog product on a cat or cat product on a dog can make your pet very ill. These products are pesticides and must be used according to the label directions in order to avoid harming the pet, humans and the environment. Also never use personal insect repellants on your pet as they may cause skin irritation. If the above measures are not effective, consult with a veterinarian about additional flea prevention and control products.

Always use a registered domestic class pest control product labelled for flea control on pets and/or pet bedding and carefully follow the label directions.

Never use any product on your pet or pet bedding unless the product label specifically recommends it.

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