



WHAT ARE FLEAS?

Fleas are a very persistent parasite – they love our warm, humid climate. Your pet can pick up fleas through contact with other animals or from the environment. Left untreated, one adult female flea can multiply into 10,000 in just 30 days.

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

An adult flea is a dark, copper colour and about the size of the head of a pin. They will make you pet scratch and nibble at their skin, though you may struggle to find them. The best chance of finding fleas is on the tummy and inner thighs where the fur is thinnest.

You will also notice ‘Flea dirt’, which looks like specks of pepper scattered on the skin surface.

WHAT DO THEY DO TO MY PET?

Fleas can make your pet's life miserable. They feed on your dog or cat's blood and can not only cause a lot of discomfort, but can lead to more serious health problems, such as anaemia, especially in puppies and kittens. They can also transmit tapeworm, as well as several diseases.

Flea bites may go unnoticed on some pets, and cause only slight irritation in others. However, if your pet is one of those with a sensitivity to flea saliva, fleas can produce extensive itching, red lesions, hair loss and secondary skin infections. This is known as flea allergy dermatitis.

CAN FLEAS AFFECT HUMANS?

Yes. Although they cause more problems for our pets than for us, we can still fall victim to their biting ways. The reason fleas are not a more common problem for humans is due to our lack of body hair. Thankfully, cases of Flea Tapeworms in humans are also uncommon.

THE FLEA LIFE CYCLE

Their life cycle is fairly complex and understanding the various stages will explain why they are so hard to control with a single treatment. In just a few weeks a couple of fleas in your pet's coat can develop into an infestation. Their entire life cycle can take as little as 12 days or as long as 180 days in cooler temperatures.

The fleas you may see on your pet are in the adult stage of their life cycle. They make up only 5% of the flea population that may be in your pet's environment. Fleas begin laying eggs about 8 hours after they first bite your pet, and they don't stop! Although they typically only live for a few weeks, the female flea may lay up to 2000 eggs in that time. Flea eggs are not sticky and can't be easily seen by the naked eye. The flea actually spends half it's life as an egg, evolving into tiny worm-like larvae in one to ten days. The larvae will bury themselves in dark places, such as deep in your carpet, bedding, cracks in the floor, and outside in the ground. The larvae feed on organic matter, and skin scales.

The last immature stage of the fleas' life cycle is spent as a pupae. They live in a sticky cocoon that are often spun around the fibres of your carpet or your pet's bedding, making removal by vacuum improbable. They usually remain there for 5-14 days but may lay dormant for up to six months, emerging when they detect heat, vibrations or exhaled carbon dioxide, all of which indicate that a host is nearby. These cocoons are impenetrable and can't be harmed by insecticides, so can cause an unexpected and sudden infestation. These fleas will not be killed until they jump onto a treated pet.

HOW DO I GET RID OF FLEAS?

To eradicate fleas, continuous treatment is required for long enough to break the flea's life cycle. New developments in recent years have made eliminating fleas on your pets and preventing further infestations much easier. Oral medication, sprays, and topical treatments (these go on the skin) are available for both dogs and cats.

Our veterinary staff will be able to advise which is the most appropriate product for your pet. And remember, it is perfectly normal to see live fleas on a pet immediately after a treatment is applied. Many believe that this means the product is not working, but the fleas have to absorb the product before they will be affected, which may take a few hours to a few days.

Keep in mind that flea products aren't always safe across species, so check before using dog flea products on your cats, as they can be toxic. As a bonus, some of the products used to control flea infestations are also effective against ticks.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Even if you only suspect you've got a minor flea issue, wash everything straight away – bedding, mats, clothing. Use the hottest temperature the fabrics can tolerate and follow up with a spin in the tumble dryer; again, with the heat as high as your fabrics will allow. Fleas die at temperatures hotter than 40 degrees. Daily vacuuming and frequent washing of your pet's bedding will go a long way to reduce the flea population in your home. The flea eggs which have fallen from your pet will be easily removed.

Vacuuming is recommended in any area your pet has access to. Even though you've vacuumed up the eggs; it's very unlikely that you've done any real damage to them – they can still thrive and will hatch within the vacuum bag and find their way out again. A steam cleaner is ideal for thicker fabrics or items too bulky for the washing machine. The best way to control flea problems is to prevent them from happening in the first place; so if you are moving into a new property make sure your pets' preventative treatment is current.