

PROTECTING YOUR PET FROM FLEAS

Fleas are the most visible parasite affecting dogs and cats ferrets and while they are traditionally thought of as a summer problem, our milder winters and centrally heated homes now make them a year-round challenge.

Even the cleanest, most well-cared for pets pick up the odd flea from time to time while out on walks, in the garden or in other homes. Their bites can be a trigger for allergic skin disease in both cats and dogs and this can lead to skin redness, itching, pain and infection. In puppies and kittens, flea infestations can be more serious, sometimes causing blood loss and anaemia. Fleas can also transmit tapeworms to your pets.

What signs should you look out for?

You may not see the fleas themselves but you may see their faeces (called flea dirt) in your pet's coat. They look like little dark brown specks and will turn red if you rub them with damp kitchen towel.

Flea bites can be irritating, causing your pet to scratch, chew their skin and over-groom, particularly at the base of their tail, groin area or along their stomach so be vigilant for this behaviour and you may also see patches of hair loss, together with red, irritated skin. Please ask for our advice quickly if you spot these signs as, if left uncontrolled, flea numbers can grow rapidly and lead to infestation.

Understanding the flea life cycle

Getting rid of fleas - and staying rid - is not as easy as it sounds but the first step in successful control is to understand the parasite's complex life-cycle:

- Adult fleas live on your pet, feeding on blood. The females lay up to 50 eggs a day which drop off as your pet moves around, ending up in carpets, under skirting and floor boards, in soft furnishings, pet bedding - even in your car.
- Larvae hatch from the eggs in either days or weeks depending on the environmental conditions. They feed on organic matter, such as human skin scales. They like the dark so burrow deep into carpets, upholstery and underneath floor boards until they turn into pupae.
- Pupae are sticky, impenetrable cocoons from which adult fleas hatch out in waves. Hatching is triggered by the warmth of your central heating, humidity and vibrations caused by passing pets or people. While pupae can hatch after as little as one week, they can also lurk unseen for up to a year, only hatching out when conditions are right.

Protecting your pet from fleas

We are used to the idea of putting a spot-on on our pet once a month and it is natural to assume that, if we stick to this regime, the job will be done. Unfortunately, the flea's life-cycle makes the task more difficult. While the spot-on will kill adult fleas on your pet at the time, it won't protect your home against pre-adult fleas - and these could constitute 95% of the flea problem in your home.

To successfully tackle fleas and break their life-cycle for good, you need to take a dual approach, treating both the adult fleas living on your pet while also protecting your home with a veterinary household flea spray which you apply directly to carpets, floors, rugs, soft furnishings and other areas, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

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