



FACT SHEET

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FLEAS !!



Sooner or later, most pet owners have to cope with FLEAS those tiny, seemingly indestructible little parasites that suck blood from pets and can make their lives miserable in a number of ways. Controlling or eliminating these pests is not always easy, but it can be *easier* if you know your enemy.

*The adult cat flea, which is now the predominant flea of dogs and cats, prefers to stay on the host all the time; it feeds, breeds, and lays its eggs on its host. It may also be the dominant flea of wild animals living in suburban areas (i.e. raccoons, opossums, and others). Many other types of fleas (dog fleas, rat fleas) tend to leave the host for extended periods; these are not significant fleas for dogs and cats.

Fleas are usually acquired in a yard or home that has been "seeded" with eggs from a flea-infested animal, not by direct transmission of adult fleas jumping from one animal to another.

*Only the adult stage of the flea is parasitic, and they represent only 1 - 10% of an established flea population. The bulk of the "fleas" are eggs and larvae, and are not on the host.

*Flea control should include treatment of the premises (the house, yard, car, and anywhere else the pet spends significant time). Treating only the pet can prove very frustrating, since only a small percentage of the fleas are being addressed, i.e. only the fleas that are on the pet.

*Itching is certainly the most obvious and expected sign of fleas, but not all pets with fleas itch, not all itching pets have fleas, and not all flea-related itchy pets have demonstrable fleas.

"ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF ABSENCE"

*Some of the most severely pruritic (itchy), flea-infested, pets can have NO demonstrable fleas.

However, they will usually have flea "dirt", an almost black, sand-sized material that is their excrement. This can usually be shaken out of the pet's coat by vigorously "scrubbing" their coat, over a countertop or bathtub. This material, when lightly sprayed with water or detergent (such as "Windex" or "409") dissolves into spots of red blood, if allowed to soak for a minute. This finding is a legitimate substitute for finding the fleas themselves, and proves fleas are present.

*"Flea Bite Allergic Dermatitis" is a condition of inflamed, frequently infected, skin provoked by the pet's exaggerated sensitivity to flea saliva, and can be compared to a person allergic to bee stings. Many of these pets may have no readily demonstrable evidence of fleas, but their condition is actually flea-induced. Flea bite allergic dermatitis commonly produces the most severe lesions in the rump, groin, and thigh areas. The skin condition will not resolve until the fleas are eliminated.

*One of the common tapeworms of dogs and cats has the flea as an intermediate host. That is to say, part of its life cycle is spent developing in the flea, while the adult stage lives in the dog or cat. The pet acquires the tapeworm cyst by swallowing an infected flea while chewing at itself, and the cyst later becomes an adult tapeworm. Tapeworm segments may be seen on feces or around the anus, and resemble a grain of rice, that moves. It is common to arbitrarily treat for tape worms after the fleas are eliminated, rather than wait for the tapeworms to appear.

*Various medications can be used to relieve the itching and complications related to severe flea problems, but the ultimate solution requires a systematic and thorough approach of flea control that is acceptable to both owner and pet.

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Flea Products and How They Work

There are a large number of flea control products available through both professional and over-the-counter (OTC) sources. Generally, control measures are directed at one of three environments of the flea life cycle; on the pet (where the adults spend most of their time), in the home (where the eggs hatch and develop), and the yard (same as the home).

On The Pet Products (**Note: ALL pets in a household must be treated, whatever product is used, and none of the commonly available products acts as a REPELLENT**)

Flea Collars, Flea Baths, Dips, Powders, Sprays- These products are all topically active, and easily available in Over-The-Counter forms. They provide relatively short term insecticide control. Some of these products also contain an "IGR", an *Insect Growth Regulator*, that acts on eggs and/or larvae to prevent the hatching of eggs, or development of larvae into adult stages. IGRs are virtually non-toxic to mammals and can have tremendous impact on insect populations even without an added insecticide.

Single Application Liquids - These are *topicals* just as the other products mentioned above, and refer to products such as "Advantage®", "Frontline Plus®", and "Revolution®". These products contain completely different classes of insecticides, and are very safe, with very long residual adulticide action.. These products can rapidly eliminate flea infestations on the pet due to their rapid action, high efficacy, and long duration of activity against adult fleas. Some of them now include an IGR as an additional layer of control. These proprietary products are generally sold exclusively through veterinarians by the companies that manufacture them. Some "sound alike / look alike" products have been sold OTC, but the formulations are not the same as the veterinary-dispensed products, and clients with experience with both products have reported reduced efficacy with the OTC products, especially in heavier infestations.

Systemically Acting Products - These are products that act *within* the pet. "Program®" is administered orally, once a month, with food, and remains active for 30 days. It does not eliminate a current infestation, but acts as a "birth control" medication for the flea, reducing or eliminating the accumulation of fleas. "Program®" should be used with some form of adulticide if an active flea infestation exists. The same active ingredient is also included in "Sentinel®", a combination flea and heartworm product. "Capstar®" is an orally administered short-term insecticide that poisons fleas that ingest it, but is non-toxic to the pet. It is active for less than 24 hours, and is administered "as needed". "Revolution®" (listed above as a topical) is a combination heartworm preventive and flea control product that is applied topically, but absorbed systemically.

In The Home Products

Foggers and Household Sprays - These products are the most common forms of household treatments, and since formulations of the products may be quite similar, (insecticide, with or without an Insect Growth Regulator) it is really a distinction based on how the product is dispersed. Foggers (or "bombs") are merely an aerosol can, designed to produce a small particle size, and spray it straight up into the air. Normal dispersion and air currents allow the droplets to spread out before settling to the ground; they do not reach the spaces under beds and furniture. Household sprays necessitate treating the house

one room at a time. This can seem more tedious than just setting off some foggers, but it is generally a more thorough approach, and treatment can be spread over a few days time with no loss of efficacy. **Don't forget the car if the pet travels around town with you!**

In The Yard Products

Lawn Insecticides - Most general purpose lawn and garden insecticides will control fleas in the yard. If owners subscribe to a lawn care service, they are frequently receiving one or two insecticidal treatments already. Be sure to read and follow all label instructions when treating your own yard, and treat any "non-lawn" areas where your pet may spend a lot of time, such as around or under shrubs and decks, or in a doghouse.

Biologic Control - Products are available that utilize parasites of insects to reduce the numbers of undesirable insects, including fleas.

The appropriate coordination and application of flea control products to the flea's environment can result in satisfactory control with a minimum of products used. One of the key actions, however, is to treat as soon as it becomes apparent that a flea population is established. If you treat your pet and soon find more fleas, it is time to think about a more comprehensive flea control treatment.