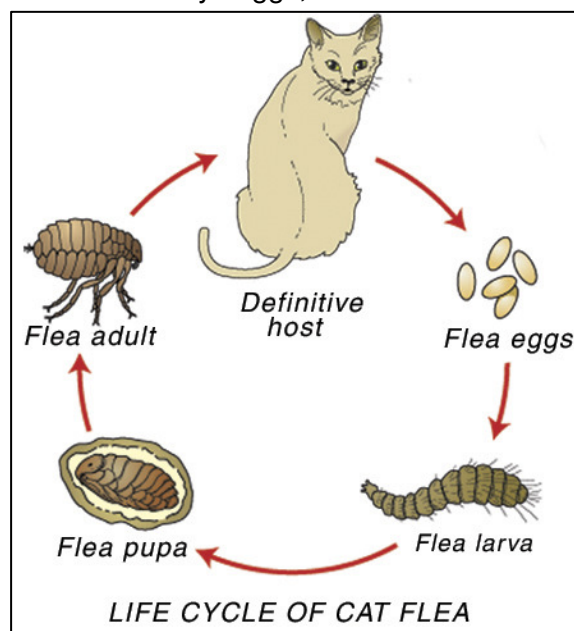


FLEA CONTROL

Where does my cat get fleas?

The most common flea found on cats and dogs is the cat flea (*Ctenocephalides felis*). Rarely rabbit fleas or hedgehog fleas are also found on cats.

The most important source of cat fleas is newly emerged adult fleas from pupae in your house or yard. Adult fleas live and feed on our pets but the female flea lays eggs, which fall off into the environment. Under favorable conditions, these eggs develop first into larvae and then into pupae. The pupae contain adult fleas that lie in wait for a suitable animal host. Modern carpeted centrally-heated homes provide ideal conditions for the year-round development of fleas. The highest numbers of flea eggs, larvae and pupae will be found in areas of the house where pets spend the most time, such as their beds and furniture. Even though fleas may be in your house, you probably won't see them; the eggs are too small to see without magnification and the larvae, which are just visible, migrate deep down in carpets, furniture or cracks in floors away from the light.



What effect do fleas have on my cat?

Many cats live with fleas but show minimal signs. However, the following problems can occur:

- Some cats develop an allergy to flea bites, especially if they are repeatedly bitten. If these cats are bitten by fleas they groom or scratch excessively and develop skin disease.
- Adult fleas live on animals and feed on blood. In kittens and debilitated animals this may cause anemia.
- The flea acts as the intermediate host for the tapeworm (*Dipylidium caninum*). Tapeworm eggs, which are shed within tapeworm segments in cat feces, are eaten by flea larvae that develop into infected fleas. Cats become infested by swallowing infected fleas during grooming. Any cat with fleas is likely also to have a tapeworm infestation.

How can I get rid of fleas on my cat?

This can be a demanding task and requires a three-pronged approach. Fleas need to be eliminated from your cat, from any other cats and dogs that you have, from your home and from your yard. Even this rigorous approach may not give 100% control as there are other sources of fleas that are beyond your control such as other people's pets, wild animals and infested environments which your cat may come into contact with outside your house.

What products are available to treat my cat?

Insecticides applied to cats are designed to kill adult fleas. Many products have limited effectiveness because they only work for a few hours after application. This is particularly true of flea shampoos and powders; they kill fleas present on your cat at the time of application but have little residual effect so the day after use the cat may again have fleas. There are new

A flea control program needs to be individually tailored based on the lifestyle of your cat and other pets, and your family situation. Your veterinarian is the best person to advise you about safe and effective flea control products.

Are insecticides safe for my cat and my family?

Insecticides for flea control should be safe both for pets and humans provided the manufacturer's instructions are carefully followed. One should be particularly careful to avoid combining insecticides with similar modes of action. Always seek your veterinarian's advice if you are unsure about this and always tell your veterinarian about any flea control products you may be using other than those which he has prescribed.

Certain types of pets (e.g. fish, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates) may be particularly susceptible to some products. Do not use any flea control products in the room in which these pets are kept without first consulting your veterinarian for advice.

I have not seen any fleas on my cat. Why has my veterinarian advised flea control?

Fleas are easy to find if a cat is heavily infested. If fleas are present in smaller numbers, it can be harder to see them and fleas move fast! Try looking on the cat's stomach, around the tail base and around the neck. Sometimes adult fleas cannot be found but "flea dirt" can be seen. This is fecal matter from the flea that contains partially digested blood and is a good indicator of the presence of fleas. Flea dirt is seen as small black specks or coiled structures; when placed on damp white tissue, they dissolve, leaving a reddish brown stain. Flea dirt may be found in cat's bedding even when fleas cannot be found on the cat.



In cats that develop an allergy to fleas one of the symptoms is excessive grooming. Cats are very efficient at removing debris from their coat's using their tongues and may succeed in removing all evidence of flea infestation such as adult fleas and flea dirt. One of the most common causes of feline allergic skin disease is flea allergy dermatitis. To investigate this possibility your veterinarian may advise rigorous flea control even though no fleas can be found. If the cat's skin problem improves with flea control then it suggests that flea allergy is involved.

I noticed my cat had fleas after his return from boarding. Did he get fleas there?

Not necessarily. Newly hatched adult fleas can survive for up to 140 days within the pupa. When you and your pets are absent from home for extended periods of time these adult fleas remain in the pupae because no host is available. As soon as you or your pet returns home, these fleas will emerge in large numbers and jump onto cats, dogs and even people in the search for a blood meal.

Despite treating my cat for fleas he still has them. Is there a "super flea"?

There is no evidence of fleas developing resistant to insecticides, especially the newer once-a-month topical flea preventives. Apparent failure of treatment almost always results from improper application of the preventive, inadequate treatment of the home or exposure to other infested pets or environments. Consider treating sheds, cars and any outdoor sleeping spots. Bear in mind that your cat may be going into other people's houses. Most of these problems can be overcome by using an effective product on the cat to kill adult fleas in addition to treating your home.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM
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