

Flea Control in Cats

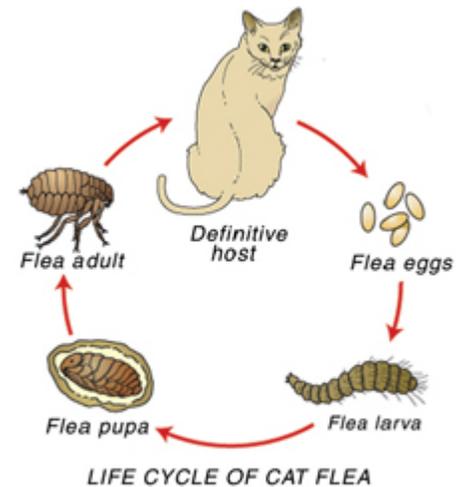
Where did my cat get fleas?

The most common flea found on cats and dogs is the cat flea (*Ctenocephalides felis*), although any species of fleas, including fleas from rabbits, squirrels or other wildlife, can be found on cats.

"Under ideal conditions, the flea can complete its entire life cycle in as little as two weeks; in adverse conditions, the cycle can take as much as a year."

The most important source of cat fleas is newly emerged adult fleas from flea pupae in your house or yard. Adult fleas live, feed and mate on our pets; the female flea lays eggs that fall off into the environment where they hatch into larvae. The larvae eat organic debris until they mature into pupae. The pupae may lie dormant for weeks to months, awaiting the ideal environmental conditions before hatching into adults. Newly hatched adult fleas jump onto a host animal to complete their life cycle. Two days after eating a blood meal from the host, the female flea begins to lay eggs. Under ideal conditions, the flea can complete its entire life cycle in as little as two weeks; in adverse conditions, the cycle can take as much as a year.

Homes with carpets and central heating 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 tiny white specks the size of dust particles, while the larvae, which are somewhat larger, with dark heads and lighter bodies, migrate deep down in carpets, furniture or cracks in floors away from the light.



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What effect do fleas have on my cat?

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

"Flea allergic cats groom or scratch excessively after being bitten by even a single flea."

- Some cats develop an allergy to fleabites, especially if they are repeatedly bitten. Flea allergic cats groom or scratch excessively after being bitten by even a single flea, and often develop skin infections secondary to this self-trauma.

- Adult fleas live on animals and feed on blood. A single adult flea consumes many times its weight in blood over its lifetime. If a kitten, or a debilitated or older cat, has a lot of fleas, the blood loss can be severe, resulting in anemia.
- The flea acts as the intermediate host for one species of tapeworm (*Dipylidium caninum*). This means that the tapeworm is only able to complete its life cycle by infecting both an intermediate host (the flea) and the definitive host (in this case, the cat). Flea larvae become infected by eating tapeworm eggs, and if a cat swallows an infected flea while grooming, the tapeworm larva will develop into an adult tapeworm. 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 challenging task and requires a three-pronged approach. Fleas need to be eliminated from your 1) cat, 2) from any other cats and dogs that you have, 3) from your home and yard. Even this thorough approach may not give 100% control, since you cannot control some sources of fleas such as other people's pets, wild animals or other property outside yours.

What products are available to treat my cat?

Although most topical insecticides will kill adult fleas, many 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; the following day the cat may again have fleas. Newer products with excellent residual activity are available from your veterinarian. Some products contain adulticide ingredients (kills adult fleas) with residual activity, while others contain *insect growth regulators* (IGR's) that prevent the larval stages from maturing and in effect sterilize the fleas. For best results in a flea infestation, use flea control products that contain an IGR.

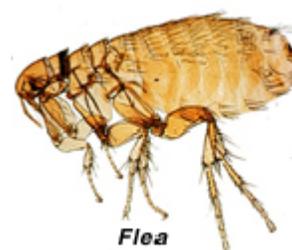
ALWAYS READ THE LABEL CAREFULLY – apply the product as instructed and repeat at the intervals stated.

How can I treat my home environment?

Environmental preparations are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Most "quick kill" products are only effective against the adult flea. The product we recommend (and carry) is Knockout spray for use in the home.

Before applying any environmental product, we recommend removing animals and humans from the premises prior to spraying and vacuuming your carpet to stimulate the pre-adult fleas to emerge from their protective cocoons. Be sure to discard the vacuum cleaner bag after its use. You can cut up an over-the-counter flea collar and place the pieces in your vacuum bag to help kill the fleas that are vacuumed up. We also recommend washing cat bedding and blankets in hot water.

Flea eggs and pupal cases are extremely tough and resistant to the effects of insecticides. To remove these stages, as well as eliminate dead fleas, your pet's bedding should be washed in hot water or replaced. Regular and thorough vacuuming of your carpets, floors and soft furnishings can remove a large number of flea eggs, larvae and pupae. You will need to throw away the vacuum bag to prevent eggs and larvae from developing inside the vacuum cleaner. Vacuuming prior to the application of a spray to the house is recommended because the vibrations will encourage newly developed fleas to emerge from pupae, which will then be killed by the insecticide.



How do I choose which products to use?

Oak Knoll Animal Hospital recommends once monthly application of Frontline or Revlotuion for the prevention of flea infestations.

Are insecticides safe for my cat and my family?

Insecticides for flea control should be safe both for pet dogs, cats 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 that he has prescribed.

"Certain types of pets (e.g. birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates) may be particularly susceptible to some products."

Certain types of pets (e.g. birds, 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.

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

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