

Fleas 101

HELPFUL INFORMATION TO RID YOUR PET AND
HOME OF THESE PESKY PESTS

Brought to you
by:

BSVVC

BERN-SABETHA VETERINARY CLINIC

{ LIFE CYCLE: *Fleas*

Any pet owner who's had trouble with fleas on their dog or cat knows how quickly an infestation of these pint-sized pests can spiral out of control. But how does it go from one flea to hundreds—even thousands—so quickly?

Here's a breakdown of the flea life cycle from egg to adult:

1. Egg. Eggs are deposited on the pet and fall into the environment within a few hours.

2. Larva. Larvae are maggot-like and approximately 0.5 cm long. They feed on blood in adult flea feces, organic debris, flea eggshells and other flea larvae.

> Flea larvae develop outdoors in cool, shady areas where pets rest as well as indoors in undisturbed, protected sites such as in carpet, under furniture and along baseboards.

3. Pupa. Whitish cocoons can be found in soil, on vegetation, in carpets, under furniture and on animal bedding.

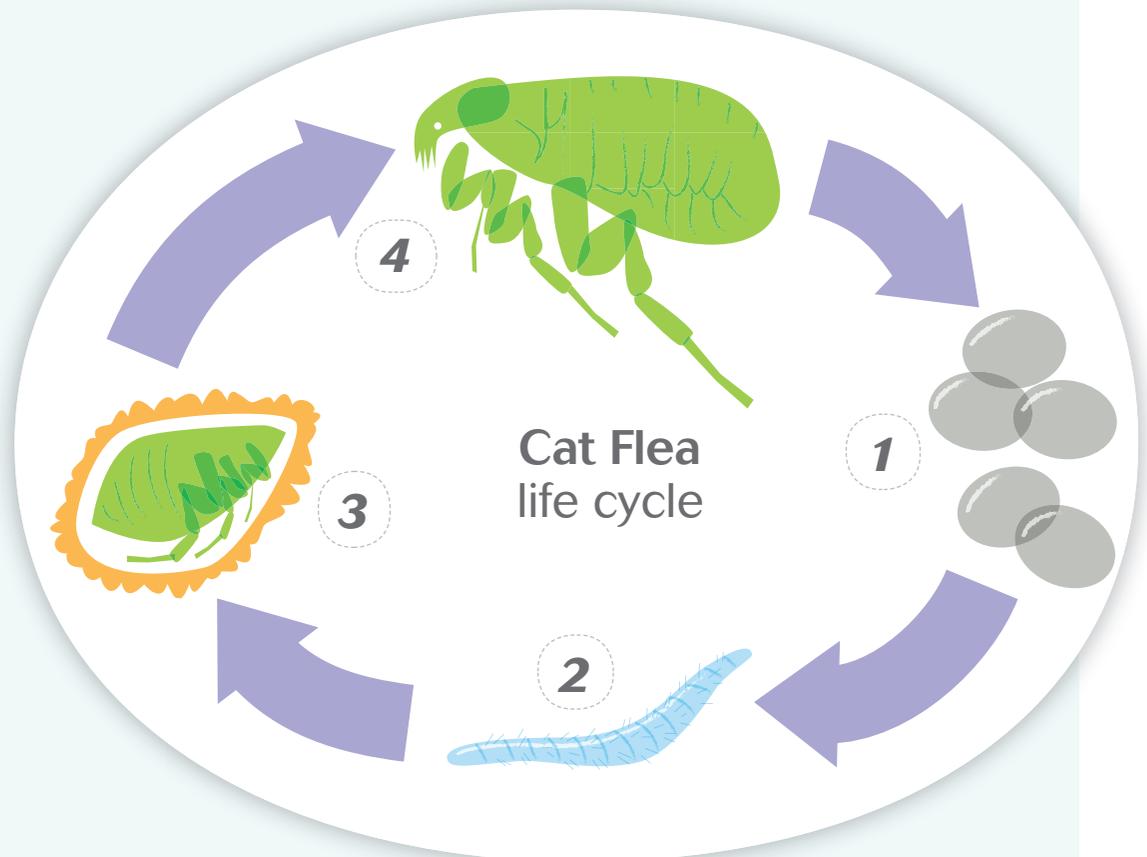
> Adults emerge about eight days after formation of the cocoon. All fleas usually emerge by day 13, depending on temperature and relative humidity.

4. Adult. Adults begin feeding immediately when on a pet—usually within three minutes.

> Egg production begins within 20 to 24 hours of females taking their first blood meal.

> Female fleas can produce 40 to 50 eggs per day—that's nearly 3,000 fleas in two months!

> During the warm summer months, the entire flea life cycle can be completed in two to three weeks.



What *you* need to know about **fleas**

Know thy enemy—and make sure your pet, your family and your home are kept flea-free.

Utter the “F” word (fleas, that is) and you’ll likely inspire looks of horror. Fleas are every pet owner’s worst nightmare. Why? Because these bloodsucking bugs can wreak havoc on your beloved pet and home.

It’s all about the life cycle

One adult female flea lays up to 50 eggs a day, which hatch and reproduce exponentially in a short time. Within the next two weeks, the eggs hatch into larvae, very small caterpillar-like creatures. The immature flea can remain in this stage for several days to a few weeks.

The larvae then spin a cocoon and enter the pupae stage. Adults usually emerge from their cozy covering within 14 days but can survive in the cocoon for several months until vibration, pressure, heat, noise, or carbon dioxide jolts them from their deep sleep.

Once they emerge from the cocoon, adult fleas must find a warm-blooded host within a few days—or they’ll die. Once a flea finds your pet, it will live out its life happily feeding off your four-legged friend. In no time, these hungry parasites can become a persistent, itchy, and dangerous problem.

Signs of flea infestation include:

- flea feces, or pepper-like specks, in your pet’s coat or on his bedding
- flea eggs, or light-colored specks, in your pet’s coat or on his bedding
- itchy skin (scratching)
- biting at his fur or legs
- patchy hair loss, especially near the tail or neck
- lethargy (especially in severe cases)
- tiny, dark brown insects scurrying around on your pet.



Fleas usually are more annoying than lethal, but they can spread tapeworms to your pet and other family members. Very small or young pets can develop anemia, a potentially life-threatening condition, because of blood loss from flea infestation. Call your veterinarian immediately if you find fleas on a puppy or kitten less than 12 weeks old or if your adult pet suddenly acts lethargic.

Intermittent flea exposure increases your pet’s risk for developing an allergic reaction called flea allergy dermatitis (FAD). Studies show that about 80 percent of allergic dogs also develop FAD.

Risk factors and detection

All pets are at risk for a flea infestation. Pets who spend time outdoors are particularly susceptible. Why? Many adult fleas live outside and on wildlife hosts until they find a happy home on your pet. Indoor dogs also are at risk because they can pick up fleas when they go outside to exercise or relieve themselves.

If you suspect your pet has fleas, it’s important to act right away. Call your veterinarian if your pet exhibits any of the signs detailed in the chart, left.

Managing a FLEA infestation

The flea life cycle is a tough thing to battle. Most people with flea issues find that fleas seem to keep coming in waves, again and again, making the fight nearly impossible. It isn't. We'll agree that it is hard, and it takes a lot of work, but you can end your flea problem once and for all by adjusting to the life cycle and striking from multiple angles.

Step 1: Treat the pet

We start with flea control on the pet because the pet is the blood source for the flea. Think of blood like fuel—without it, the fleas can't live. Pretty simple, right? The best flea protection available on the market comes in the form of veterinarian-recommended topical flea products. We have products in stock at our clinic that are easy to apply and affordable.



Step 2: Treat the environment

After treating every pet in the house, it's time to move on to the house itself. This is often the toughest part. The use of insecticidal foggers or "flea bombs" helps you remove fleas from the household. Unfortunately, you can't use foggers while people or animals—anything with a heartbeat—are in the house. Most pet owners set off the foggers after packing their pets into carriers and simply spend the afternoon in the backyard, weather permitting.

Note: Each insecticidal fogger on the market carries its own instructions and warnings. Read the entire label fully before using any products. Often electronics need to be covered with plastic. Make sure to pay attention to square footage requirements. You will most likely need multiple cans of fogger for your home to be properly treated. Don't leave out rooms that your pets



don't enter. Fleas can go anywhere. That includes your basement, laundry room, bathrooms and even closets. Open your doors while fogging, then wash your clothing afterwards. Remember, the fleas could be in your clothing, too.

Once your living spaces are "bombed" with the foggers, open all the windows and let your house breathe. Vacuum all floor surfaces and empty the contents of the bag or container into a trash bag outside, then immediately dispose of this bag. Flea eggs can hatch in your vacuum cleaner, starting the life cycle all over again.

Repeat this process starting at the beginning after three weeks to fully resolve your situation.

Why your home is a **FLEA MAGNET**

When it comes to fleas, your pet is most likely to become a target if it comes into contact with an infested area or environment. Read on for reasons your home makes an ideal environment for fleas to flourish—and what you can do about it.

Outside the home

For successful reproduction, fleas select protected, shady, undisturbed areas, for example:

- ✦ Porches
- ✦ Decks
- ✦ Stairs
- ✦ And around doghouses

Inside the home

Inside the home, fleas thrive.

They will go from egg to adult:

- ✦ In pet beds
- ✦ Under furniture
- ✦ Buried deep in carpets

PLUS, they can survive a wide range of temperatures, so even winter is no guarantee you have seen the last of fleas. Without the ideal temperature, early flea stages lay dormant, delaying the emergence of adult fleas—anywhere from two weeks to just under six months. Fleas will do just fine in microenvironments around the home, where temperature and humidity are elevated.

What you can do:

Your veterinary team can offer advice on how you can eliminate microenvironments. Here's how you might start:



Eliminate weeds and brush piles



Keep rodents away from your home



Treat your yard with outdoor products



Routinely cut your grass



Vacuum regularly (under furniture, too)



Wash bedding—yours and Fido's—routinely



Keep baseboards and other hidden areas clean

By learning more and listening to your veterinary team, you and your pet will be able to enjoy quality time together—**flea-free.**

SOURCE: Julie Legred, CVT, board member of the Companion Animal Parasite Council

TOP 10 *flea myths*



Think you know about fleas' impact on pets? Test your knowledge with these common myths.

Myth 1: A few fleas are no big deal.

REALITY: You've heard the expression "breeding like rabbits"? Well, rabbits have nothing on fleas—a few fleas can turn into a massive infestation in a hurry. And if your pet is sensitive to flea antigen, even one or two bites can make him very uncomfortable. Your pet deserves to be completely free of fleas.

Myth 2: Pets need flea preventive only a few months out of the year.

REALITY: In many warm, humid areas, fleas thrive year round. Even in more seasonal climates, a warm spring or fall can extend the flea season to nine or 10 months of the year. Plus, fleas can survive on your pet and inside anywhere! Year-round flea control is best for your pet.

Myth 3: I've never seen a flea on my pet, so she doesn't need flea control.

REALITY: You may be in flea denial. Just because you don't see fleas doesn't mean they aren't there. Your veterinarian can use a special comb to detect fleas and their waste, so ask her to do this if she hasn't already. Even if your pet's clean, she can pick up fleas at any time, so it's a good idea to protect her.

Myth 4: I can get good flea products at the pet store.

REALITY: Over-the-counter flea control products are not as potent and therefore not as effective as the prescription products you can get from your veterinarian. Some are even toxic, especially if administered incorrectly. Your pet's doctor can prescribe the best product for your pet and his lifestyle (does he swim? hunt rodents?) and show you exactly how to apply it.

Myth 5: Once I treat my pet and the fleas go away, my work is done.

REALITY: One of the biggest mistakes pet owners make is to stop giving a flea product after the fleas go away. But you need to provide continuous control for this reason: Pets can become ultra sensitive to fleas if they're intermittently exposed. If you notice fleas, treat them, and three months later they come back and you treat them again, your pet is more likely to develop flea allergy dermatitis—a condition that causes itchiness, lesions, and hair loss. Don't let the fleas come back at all, and your pet is at a much lower risk for flea allergy.

Myth 6: I only need to treat my one flea-ridden pet, not the other pets in my household.

REALITY: All of the pets in your household need to be treated—especially the cats (fleas' favorite host) and even the guinea pig. Some pets are more sensitive to fleas than others, so if you only treat the pet that's scratching and has fleas, she's likely to be reinfested by other pets in the house that also have fleas but aren't giving you any itchy signals.

Myth 7: I can't afford to give a flea preventive monthly.

REALITY: Can you afford to change the oil in your car to keep it running smoothly and help cut down on expensive repairs? Providing preventive health measures for your pet is the same approach. Compared to the stress and cost of treating flea-related illnesses—and possibly paying someone to decontaminate your home—monthly control is a low-cost alternative. If you can't afford to pay for a year's worth at a time, ask your veterinarian about setting up a realistic program, such as having a three-month supply mailed to you.

Myth 8: My pet stays in the back yard, so he won't pick up fleas.

REALITY: Your yard is constantly being visited by wildlife such as raccoons and opossums, as well as other neighborhood pets (cats are notorious roamers). These animals can spread fleas and flea eggs, which can infest your pet when he goes outside.

Myth 9: All flea preventives protect pets from fleas only.

REALITY: Flea products are often combined with agents that control other parasites as well, helping protect your pets from additional diseases—some of which can be transmitted to you. So keeping pets on flea control is best for the whole family.

Myth 10: Flea products are toxic.

REALITY: Unlike "natural" products, prescription flea control agents have been extensively tested and approved by the FDA. Your veterinarian and the members of his hospital team use these products on their own pets, and they can answer any questions you have about safety.

5 facts about flea allergy dermatitis

Your pet can't stop itching, but why? Here's a look at flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), a condition your pet could be suffering from, even if you've taken all the standard precautions against fleas. Read through the information, then consult with your veterinarian to find the best treatment option for your pet.

1. FAD is common.

According to the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC), flea allergy dermatitis accounts for about 50 percent of all canine and feline dermatological cases reported to veterinarians. Watch for scratching around the tail base, rear, and groin in dogs, and scratching or crusty bumps around your cat's neck. Cats with FAD also tend to lick constantly, often to the point of exposing bare skin.



2. FAD can affect your pet even if you've administered a topical or oral parasite preventive.

Most of the more popular parasite preventives work great for the average pet, particularly when used year-round. But they're not magic. When a flea jumps on your pet, the preventive doesn't kill it instantly—there's always a bit of a delay. If your pet suffers from FAD, a few bites over time can result in hours of scratching or licking.

3. Fleas aren't always present with FAD.

You can search and search and come up empty. Your veterinarian may not even be able to spot a flea on

your pet. Fleas are fast, and some pets have thick coats. The fleas don't want to be spotted, so even a thorough search can overlook them. And all it takes is a quick walk near a nest of fleas to expose your pet to a whole new batch.

4. Your other pets won't necessarily itch.

Not all pets are affected with FAD. So even if you've administered parasite preventives to all of your pets and they all spend the same amount of time outdoors, one might spend all day scratching his itchy coat while the other remains unaffected.

5. Even indoor cats can suffer from FAD.

Fleas don't just nest outdoors. Your other pets could carry them into the house, or they could sneak in with your human guests. As long as they have a warm place to thrive, they pose a threat to your pets.

Common treatment options for FAD include a 10- to 14-day dose of a mild steroid, along with a vigilant protocol for flea control. Most pets will find relief from itching within one to two days. Talk to your veterinarian to find what will work best for your pet.

Source: Dr. Carlo Vitale, San Francisco Veterinary Specialists