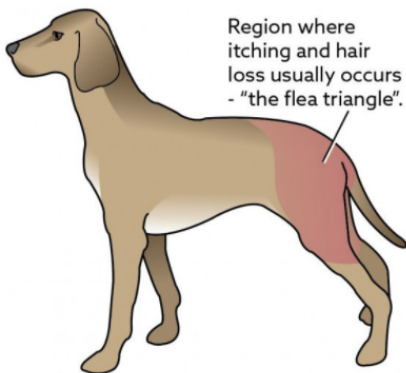


Fleas and Flea Allergy Dermatitis

The adult flea spends most of its time living on cats and dogs. **Cats are extremely good at swallowing fleas so that you never see them.** Fleas lay eggs on the animals, but these eggs rapidly fall off the pets and are distributed in the parts of the environment where the pets spend most of their time. The eggs hatch into larvae which evolve into pupae (cocoon) emerging in the future as adult fleas. **For one adult flea found on your pet there are at least one hundred immature fleas in the animal's environment.**



Flea allergy is the most common cause of itching and scratching in the dog and cat. When the flea bites your pet, it injects a small amount of saliva into the skin. Dogs and cats can develop an allergy to this saliva and will react to it with severe itching and scratching. This itching sensation may last for up to two weeks after the last flea bites. In the dog, the most commonly observed signs of flea allergy are: biting and scratching around the rump, tailbase, and groin area; "hot spots;" and secondary skin infections. Cats may show flea bite allergy more subtly. You may see areas of hair loss and scratching, but more often you will feel small scabs and bumps around their necks and down their backs (miliary dermatitis).



It may seem confusing to hear that your dog or cat has flea allergy dermatitis if you never see fleas. This is mainly due to the fact that your pet has a remarkable capacity to chase and subsequently eat the fleas! You may also find evidence of fleas on your pet by using a fine comb and brushing out the "flea dirt" that they leave behind. This "dirt" looks like small black dots, and is the excrement of the flea. When placed on wet paper, it dissolves in red streaks because it contains partially digested blood.

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution for flea allergy, nor is there a magical medication. The only long-term efficacious and safe therapy for flea allergy dermatitis is to keep your pet from being bitten by fleas. This may seem like an impossible task, but it is not. Remember, successful resolution of the flea-allergic animal's misery requires that the fewest number of fleas bite your pet.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FLEA CONTROL

The control of fleas is an ongoing process, but once started, it is not difficult to sustain. The following recommendations will help you in this control, but you should remember that they are simply guidelines. The flea control program you use must be tailored to your individual situation. Just as we are constantly updating our protocol, you will need to change yours as new products become available and the efficacy of those now in use are altered by time of year, location, and reformulation.

The products listed in this handout are some carried by the hospital pharmacy. We do not endorse any particular brand-name product. Our intention is to recommend a specific active ingredient for use, and we use the products that we stock as examples.

DOGS

We recommend the use of an adulticide product for all dogs and cats in the households. The "spot-on" product *from your Vet's Hospital* offer both safety and convenience. These products have been shown to be very effective when used as instructed. They are not absorbed into your pet's bloodstream (they stay in the skin), making them very safe. Accurate dosage is based on the dog's weight. These products are applied by parting the hair between the shoulder blades and down the back, applying the small amount of liquid onto the skin. Application frequency varies with the product and bathing needs. These products are most often applied every 4 weeks. It is recommended that you apply the spot-on treatment 1-2 days after bathing. Depending on the product, fleas contacting your pet will die within 12-36 hours after exposure to the spot-on product. Your Vet will help you choose the best product for your pet based on many factors.

CATS

If you own cats, they must be involved in the flea control program even if they are not exhibiting any problems, or they will carry the fleas to your house, yard, and dogs. Cats are much more sensitive to the chemicals in flea preparations, and many insecticides cannot be used on them. All these products are applied in a similar fashion as in dogs except you deposit most of the liquid at the base of the head so the cat can't lick it off.

CONTROL OF JUVENILE FLEAS

Several life stages occur before a flea becomes a biting adult. Some of these juvenile stages are also targets for flea control. Decreasing the numbers of immature (juvenile) fleas is an excellent way to help prevent adult fleas and their bites. **Products such as capstar, flea combs, flea sprays, flea shampoos, and most flea collars do not have residual activity and will NOT fully protect your pet.**

SIGNS OF TOXICITY

All flea control products are potentially toxic or may produce unexpected side effects. Toxicity may result from accidental overdose or unexpected sensitivity. Known side effects, although rare, are vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, sluggishness, weakness, or abnormal behavior. If you suspect that your animal is reacting adversely to a flea control product, stop using the product and consult your veterinarian immediately. If the reaction occurs immediately after application, the product should be rinsed off thoroughly and the animal brought to the veterinarian for evaluation.. Keep all products out of the reach of children. Cats are particularly sensitive to many pesticides. **For cats, it is very important to only use products labeled to be safely used on cats.** If you have any questions about a product's safety, please consult your veterinarian.

FLEA CONTROL IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT

House and yard treatments need to be concentrated on "source points", areas where pets spend most of their time. This typically would include the bedding and resting areas, the feeding location, etc. You can lessen the flea burden in your home by thorough vacuuming of all source points followed by disposal of the vacuum bag and by washing all animal bedding weekly in hot water and drying at high heat for twenty minutes. Steam cleaning of rugs and carpeting +/- upholstery is also helpful.

In the yard, focus on areas where your pet(s) spend most of their time. Typically, fleas survive and reproduce in shaded, moist areas with plant or organic debris (under decks, bushes, etc). Fleas do not survive or reproduce well in sunny, open areas of lawn or patio. Elimination of yard debris will be helpful in reducing flea numbers. You may choose to use a professional exterminator service for the treatment of fleas in your home and garden.