



## Fleas

Fleas are a major inconvenience, but did you know they can also pose a serious health threat to you and your pet? Here's what you need to know to keep your house and pets free of fleas.



Cat Flea (*Ctenocephalides felis*)

1. **Adult fleas live on your pet unless forced to leave. They do not jump from animal to animal.** However, the freshly hatched adults will jump on anything available (but they prefer

our pets over us). Therefore, it is important to treat each animal in the house with flea medicine so they don't act as a chauffeur to the fleas.

2. **If you see fleas on your pet, it is guaranteed there are more in the environment (aka your house!).**

When you see fleas, they've been in your house for at least a month. Adult fleas lay eggs that fall off into the house and yard. Since they simply fall off, they are more likely to be in areas where your pet sleeps or jumps up and down from, for example a couch. The eggs are so tiny (resembling grains of salt) that they can even survive in the cracks of wooden floors, under cushions, and in bedding. This makes it important to vacuum everywhere and wash bedding.

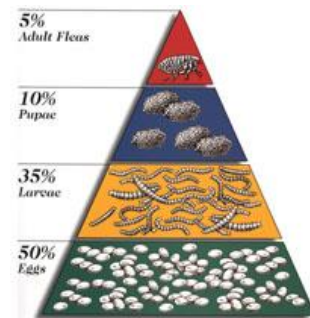
3. **The immature fleas, called larvae, hatch from eggs and look for a dark place since they do not like light.** What this means for you is that you should vacuum UNDER things such as the bed or couch. If your pet sleeps on the couch, vacuum in the crevices of the couch.

4. **The larvae form a cocoon and become pupae which are almost impossible to kill. This life stage can be dormant (inactive) for several months.** They will hatch in response to vibrations, heat, and carbon dioxide (aka any breathing) and become adult fleas. Vacuuming will help stimulate these pupae to hatch. Because no known chemical will kill this form, it means that you will have more fleas.

This is why it becomes important to treat for at least 3 consecutive months. Since the pupae can be dormant for a long period of time, it is also a wise idea to treat your pet for fleas if you are coming back from vacation or moving to a new home. This ensures that all of the pupae that hatch will be killed when they try to feed off your pet (and therefore they don't get a chance to lay more eggs).

5. **Adult fleas only account for 5% of the total population.** Therefore if you see 5 fleas, that means there are 95 other life stages (eggs, larvae, pupae) that are waiting to become adult fleas.

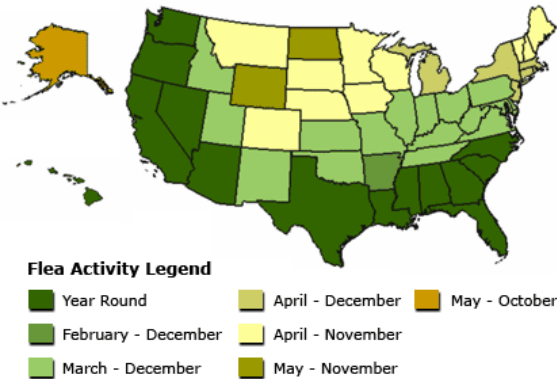
This is why it is important to treat for fleas even if you only see one. Cats are notorious for their cleanliness and will often clean the fleas off before you see them.



6. **Fleas prepare for winter by increasing in number throughout the summer.** This results in the highest number of fleas seen in the fall months (which many people do not expect). Treating until at least two heavy frosts have occurred is important to avoid this late season flea problem.

**7. Even if fleas cannot survive the winter outside, they can thrive in your house and on wildlife.**

Because of this, we recommend that your pet be on flea prevention all year round. It is easier and healthier to avoid fleas than to treat.



**8. Fleas are one of the common causes of tapeworms.** They carry a parasite called tapeworms that your pet gets through swallowing a flea. This infection may stay hidden for up to a year since it is most commonly diagnosed through visualization of the tapeworm segments near the anus. These segments look like pieces of rice. Therefore, all pets with fleas should be treated for tapeworms.

**9. Fleas are also a health risk for humans and pets.**

They carry diseases such as hemobartonella (a blood parasite that can affect cats), bubonic plague (yes, the “Black Plague” that killed millions in 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe is still around), and cat scratch disease. They can also cause a severe allergic reaction to their bite where your pet experiences intense itching and self injury (called flea allergic dermatitis).

Given the possibility of disease, it is best to prevent fleas altogether. Treat all pets, indoors or outdoors, monthly with approved flea prevention.

**10. Not all flea medicines are the same.** Make sure to read labels carefully. A dog flea medicine that is placed on a cat can be toxic. Also, make sure to use a product that works. Some over the counter medicines claim to kill fleas but are just a waste of money.

Do not use flea collars on your pet. They do not kill fleas. Instead, they are chemicals near your pet’s face that the fleas avoid

