

Fleas & Your Pet

With the recent warm weather the fleas have come out in force to infest the dogs and cats of this area. Many dogs and cats are allergic to fleas and this causes these animals to itch and scratch themselves. Fleas also carry a type of tapeworm that infects dogs and cats when they groom or bite themselves. But where have all these fleas come from, and what can we do about them?

To answer these questions it is important to understand the lifecycle of the flea.

Of the total flea population only 5% are adult fleas that exist on your pet. The other 95% live in the environment. They live in your pets bedding, in the soil outside, in the carpets inside, in those cracks between the floorboards and even on rats and mice.

The adult flea lays eggs that are about 0.5mm in length. In warm weather these eggs take only 2-10 days to hatch into larvae. These larvae live on organic matter and the blood rich faeces ('flea dirt') of the adult flea. After moulting (shedding their skin and regrowing it) twice over 9-15 days these larvae form a protective cocoon with a pupae inside. These pupae usually mature in 5-9 days but can last for up to 1 year. In the cocoon the pupae are extremely resistant to heat and pesticides!

When the pupae detect vibrations, carbon dioxide and heat indicating a host (your pet) is nearby and the right environment (warmth and moisture) they hatch into adult fleas. The adult flea jumps straight onto your pet and start feeding on its blood. Within 2-3 days the female flea can lay up to 50 eggs per day and can live to up to 100 days.

In order to control fleas we need to break this lifecycle. Simply killing all the fleas on your pet on one day will not work as there will be many more eggs hatching into larvae, developing into pupae, maturing into adult fleas ready to jump back onto your dog. Since the pupae can live for up to 1 year flea control is not a once off treatment.

Fleas do not die in winter – their lifecycle just slows down when it is cold and a warm house is just as good as a spring or summer day!

To be successful we need to:

1. Kill the adult fleas on your pet
2. Control the immature fleas in the environment
3. Treat all pets/animals in the environment
4. Maintain this treatment all year.

There are many flea control products in the market place aimed at treating the fleas on your pet and those in the environment. Please contact your vet to find out what product best suits your situation.