

Information Sheet

Flea Control

Fleas

Fleas are an extremely common source of irritation and worry for both pets and owners. Flea problems occur all year round and if your pet has a flea allergy then the problem is extremely distressing.

The first flea is picked up from another pet, communal sleeping places, or from wildlife e.g. rabbits / hedgehogs.

You may think that if your pet is kept entirely indoors then they will not be at risk of getting fleas, however remember that it only takes a visit from an animal carrying a flea for an infestation to occur.

If your pet picks up a female flea she can lay 30-40 eggs in just one day and may lay 200 eggs over a period of five days. These shiny eggs fall off the animal, wherever it goes in your house and will hatch in 4-12 days. These subsequent fleas become the major source of infestation and contaminate the pet's environment, usually our homes.

Pupae can survive in carpets, bedding and crevices around the home for many months until stimulated to hatch by the presence of a dog, cat or human. Warmth, vibrations or CO₂ from breath will cause a hungry flea to hatch within minutes, thus restarting an infestation.

Why control fleas?

Fleas are not just an inconvenience, they can transmit several diseases, as well as tapeworm, and their saliva causes itching and sometimes a nasty skin disease in pets called flea allergic dermatitis. In these cases it is essential to eradicate fleas from your home or at least reduce them to a very low level.

Diagnosis

The first sign of a flea problem may be seeing your pet scratching, biting its coat or showing signs of discomfort.

Scratching, licking and irritation may be very severe in cases of flea allergy or very mild or even nonexistent in non-allergic animals. Often you'll see these signs without being able to find the cause because fleas are fast movers and easy to miss. Cats especially will groom a flea out of their coats before you get chance to see what is making them uncomfortable.

Flea faeces are often the only evidence of the flea infestation. They are jet black granules found on the animal's fur and bedding. Their presence can be demonstrated by brushing the animal's coat onto damp white paper, the granules will dissolve to create a red or brown stain. The colouration of the stain is due to the presence of digested blood.

Occasionally, small white shiny flea eggs may be found in a pet's bed. In cases of flea allergy there may be no evidence of fleas at all, especially in cats, due to the extra thorough grooming.

Flea reproduction and infestation

Fleas breed all year round but do so most quickly in warm moist conditions such as during the summertime, or in centrally heated buildings. Adult fleas account for only 5% of infestations, the other 95% is made up of fleas in the other stages of the lifecycle.

Success in controlling fleas requires patience as resistant pupae will hatch gradually; full control may take 2-3 months to achieve. Maintenance of control is essential once achieved to prevent re-infestation.

Flea Control

Effective flea control is a three stage process. It is vitally important that all three stages are carried out to ensure success. We recommend that you...

- 1. Kill adult fleas on all your pets:**
Various treatments are available from the surgery, please call for more information.
- 2. Thoroughly clean your home:**
Wash or destroy pet bedding, regularly vacuum floors and furniture using a flea collar in the dust bag.
- 3. Prevent fleas breeding in your home:**
These effective treatments are available from the surgery. Success in controlling fleas requires patience as resistant pupae will hatch gradually; full control may take 2-3 months to achieve. Maintenance of control is essential once achieved to prevent re-infestation.

Professional Advice

Alexander Veterinary Centre provides a range of effective flea control products. These are best given with our personalised, professional advice relating to your specific circumstances. Please contact us for advice on any aspect of flea control.

Special Notes for Rabbits

Flea control in rabbits can be important to help reduce the spread of myxomatosis. Do not use Frontline on rabbits as it is toxic to them. Please contact us for specific advice on rabbit healthcare. Rabbits are prone to fly strike, a distressing and potentially fatal infestation of maggots, this is more common in the warmer months. If you find maggots on your rabbit don't panic but treat it as an emergency and contact your vet immediately.

