

FLEAS – HOW TO GET RID OF AN INFESTATION



All about fleas

About 5% of the flea lifecycle is spent on your pet, and the rest is spent in the environment. Adult fleas live on pets, and lay eggs which fall off into your pet's surroundings (bedding, carpets, sofa, outside...). An adult flea can lay 50 eggs a day! The fleas then go through a larval stage and a pupal stage whilst they are in the environment, which can take just three weeks in hot conditions and as long as six months in cold or dry conditions. Once they are mature, the vibrations and warmth from a nearby pet stimulate the pupae to hatch, and adult fleas emerge to jump on the pet, starting the lifecycle all over again.

How flea treatments work

Flea treatments usually work by killing the adult fleas when they are on your pet (there are some exceptions to this). Some treatments also sterilise the fleas, so any eggs they do manage to lay before being killed by the treatment will not hatch out.

What to do to treat an infestation

- Make sure all pets in the house (cats, dogs and rabbits) are treated with an appropriate flea treatment for AT LEAST three months, and ideally six months, to ensure all flea eggs in the house have time to hatch out into adults, jump on a treated pet and die. If you stop treatment after one or two months then some eggs will remain in the house, and when they hatch out three or four months later and jump on an untreated pet, they can lay more eggs and set up the infestation all over again.
- Do not stop your pet from going to their usual places around the house. By the time you become aware of fleas your pet will already have dropped eggs everywhere they go. If you stop them going into a certain room then the immature fleas will simply stay dormant until you eventually let your pet back in. Or worse, they will hatch and bite your ankles instead! A household spray can be used to reduce numbers of immature fleas in the house. Make sure you follow the instructions on the can as these sprays can be harmful to aquatic life. A household flea spray does not replace flea treatment for your pet – you must still make sure that all pets are treated.
- Vacuuming around the house can help get rid of the flea infestation more quickly by encouraging the immature flea stages in the environment to hatch out – the heat and vibrations from the vacuum cleaner fool the fleas into thinking there is a pet nearby.
- Washing any bedding or washable soft furnishings at 60 degrees will kill any immature fleas in the bedding, helping to reduce the numbers of fleas in the house.

These pointers should help you get rid of a flea infestation for good. It is worth noting that it is quite normal to see fleas on your pet for several weeks after starting treatment as the immature stages in the house hatch out and jump on your pet. As the flea treatment works to kill them quickly you should see your pets being less itchy over a couple of weeks. And don't forget – even if the fleas seem to have disappeared after a few weeks it is really important to continue treatment for at least three months, to catch those new fleas that are continuing to hatch out in the house.