

HOT WEATHER = FLEAS!

Now that the warmer weather has arrived (and how!) we are seeing lots of itchy pets. By far the most common reason for itchy pets is fleas (even if you can't see the fleas on your pet). It has been a bad season for fleas as animals that have "never had fleas" are coming in to get some relief from this irritating problem.

The most important source of fleas is NOT other dogs or cats with fleas but newly developed adult fleas lying in wait in the environment (e.g. in your pets' bedding, the dirt under the house, the carpet etc.). Adult fleas live and feed on animals and the female lays eggs which fall off into the environment. These eggs develop first into larvae then into pupae. The pupae contain adult fleas lying in wait for a suitable animal host. The highest number of flea eggs, larvae and pupae will be found in areas in the house where pets spend most time, but you probably won't be able to see them as the eggs are microscopic and the larvae burrow deep down into the carpet or cracks in the floor.

Fleas bite and cause irritation to your dog or cat's skin. The most common signs of a flea problem are scratching (especially around the base of the tail) and finding "flea dirt" (small dark grains of dried blood) in your pets' coat or bedding. You may not see adult fleas on your pet but this does not mean they are not infested – 95% of the flea population are the microscopic life stages that live in the environment off the animal.

Fighting a flea infestation can be simple if the right products are used. Products such as flea collars, flea shampoos and rinses will kill the fleas on your pet at the time, but will not kill the fleas in the environment. Unfortunately it is virtually impossible to clean your environment of fleas by vacuuming or washing or spraying, so this environmental reservoir will continue to reinfest your pet. Feral or native animals can also act as sources of new flea infestation. If you are using a product that only kills adult fleas on your pet, it can take several months to get control of the flea problem as the various stages of the flea life cycle continue in your environment. Flea bombs or foggers are not very effective at penetrating into the nooks and crannies favoured by fleas, while sprays are unable to kill the pupae and require daily vacuuming for two weeks for maximum effectiveness.

Monthly spot-ons (such as Frontline Plus, Advantage and Advocate) are effective in killing the fleas on your pet for an entire month. There is also the option of a monthly tablet (Comfortis) that seems especially useful in those animals that have ongoing flea problems despite regular spot-on treatment (perhaps because they keep washing the spot-on products off by jumping in the dam or trough!). These products break the flea life cycle and control all flea stages (adults, eggs and larvae) with each application, so that as new fleas jump onto your pet, they are quickly exterminated by the long-lasting treatment while eggs and larvae are prevented from developing into pupae. All pets in the household should be treated and bedding cleaned regularly to achieve the best flea control.

It is important to keep applying the spot-on treatments or tablets monthly, even over the cooler months. This gives you the best chance of effectively killing the flea life stages as they develop. These products are safe to use in puppies and kittens over 8 weeks of age (some from as young as 2 days old!) and in pregnant or lactating bitches and queens. They should be applied to a dry coat and your pet should not be bathed or allowed to swim for 2 days after application.

As discussed last month, there may be other reasons why your pet is itchy, including seasonal and contact allergies. Signs that your pet might have an allergy include licking at paws, rubbing ears and scratching at bellies and groins.

If you are worried about fleas and/or your pet's itching, please give us a call and we'll be happy to help you out.

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