

Stop The Adults Breeding

If we stop all adults breeding, then the number of fleas will fall dramatically, as there are only a few brought in from outside the house or other animals. One way is to use PROGRAM. This is a tablet or liquid given by mouth every month. The chemical reaches your pet's blood-stream, the flea takes some in when feeding, and becomes sterile. As the drug only affects insects it is very safe. Program is also available as an injection (6-monthly) for cats only. Because of the way it works, ALL pets in the house must be treated to stop ALL adult fleas breeding. It is good for animals with low levels of fleas, but should be used with Frontline in flea allergic pets.

Stop The Eggs Developing

A number of sprays for the carpets (NOT for pets) are available, such as Acclaim, Nuvan Staykill, & Indorex. They last between 7 and 12 months, and prevent the eggs hatching to adults. Like Program, they can be used alone if there are low levels of fleas, but should be used with Frontline in flea allergic pets.

RABBIT FLEAS

Rabbits that live in hutches will have fewer as the conditions are not so good for breeding outside. House rabbits suffer the same as an indoor dog or cat. There are now some treatments licenced for rabbits as a spot on. Ask at reception for details.

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FLEA CONTROL AND YOUR PET



This is one of a series of information handouts written by our vets and nurses for our clients and their pets

Fleas are the commonest parasites found on dogs, cats & rabbits. At some point during its life almost every dog and cat will suffer a flea infestation. Despite recent advances in flea treatments, they are often a frustrating problem, and good control is vital.

THE FLEA

Fleas are wingless insects, with an ability to jump huge distances in relation to their size. A jump of 3 to 4 feet is not unusual! They have a hard outer shell which protects them.

Like all insects, the flea has four stages in its life. It starts as an adult, and develops through egg, larva and pupa, which then turns into an adult again.

The adult flea lives mainly on animals. It prefers hairy skin, where there is some protection, and this is why humans are not a preferred choice. They will bite humans 'in passing' but will not breed on them.

Fleas will feed from any animal, although they prefer to stay on just the one. The adults feed on blood. Their mouths are specialised and one part is like a sharp needle. This is injected into the skin, flushed with saliva which acts as an anticoagulant so that the blood does not clog up the needle, and they then have a good feed. A few days later the females lay eggs—up to 1500 over a week or so.

The eggs fall off onto the floor, and develop into tiny larvae and these then

form a cocoon. These will 'hatch' into more adults.

The whole process takes as little as 20 days in warm conditions—our south coast climate or a centrally heated house are ideal! However, if conditions are cold and low humidity, the cocoons will tend to lie dormant and wait until it warms up.

Most dogs and cats catch their fleas from newly hatched adults in the environment, but fleas can be picked up from other animals, including wild rabbits, hedgehogs and other small mammals.



WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

- They cause **itchiness**, and your pet may damage themselves by over-grooming.
- They often carry the commonest **tapeworm** seen in our pets.
- Some pets are **allergic** to flea bites (actually to the saliva they inject), and this means one bite can cause irritation all over the body. We are seeing this as an increasingly common problem.

- Some **humans** develop a nasty reaction to flea bites.
- They **breed** so quickly that a small problem can easily become a big one!

HOW DO WE CONTROL THEM?

Killing The Adults

Adults prefer to live in your pet's coat, so this is one place to attack them. Traditionally organo-phosphates were used as sprays, collars, tablets or spot-ons, but these are potentially unsafe for us and your pet, so we have moved away from them.

Our preferred treatment at present is "Frontline". This comes as a spray which is active for about 2 months, and will withstand day-to-day activities like swimming. Alternately, there is a spot-on dropper used on the back of the neck. The spot-on lasts 8 weeks (dogs) and 5 weeks (cats), and is more convenient, but slightly more expensive. We find that Frontline is safe, reliable, and the best value for money.

If your pet is allergic to flea bites, it is important to kill the adults quickly before they feed. Therefore, a treatment like Frontline is vital.