

# ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

## Help! My pet has fleas!

Fleas are not only a nuisance, but they can be harmful to your pet causing serious allergies, infections and, sometimes, anemia. What can you do to keep your pet flea free? What do you do if your pet already has fleas? Read on!

First of all, we need to know a little about the flea life cycle. The adult fleas you see on your pet are only a small part of the problem. Adult fleas spend nearly all of their life on the host—your dog or cat. Adult female fleas lay up to 40 eggs per day and can live for 4-6 weeks which means a single adult flea can lay 1200-1600 eggs in her lifetime! Multiply that times numerous females and you could have tens of thousands of fleas. The eggs fall off of the pet contaminating the environment and then hatch into larvae—tiny caterpillar or maggot-like worms. Larvae make up about 50% of a flea infestation. It is important to try to kill the eggs and larvae, not just the adult fleas. Those larvae spin a pupa or cocoon which is nearly impossible to penetrate with insecticides. From this cocoon, adult fleas emerge and look for a host on which to feed. Because of this cycle and the pupa stage, it may take weeks to months to eliminate an existing flea problem. It is also why, even if you are treating pets properly with flea treatment, that you may still see some adult fleas. It does not mean that your product is not working, only that you probably have some new fleas emerging from pupae.

It is vitally important to treat every single pet in the household with an approved topical flea product every single month throughout the year. There are many reliable, veterinary approved products for dogs and cats, and talk to your vet about options for rabbits, ferrets and the like if needed. However, one important thing to remember, NEVER, EVER use a product that is labeled for dogs on a cat! Make sure that you are using only products specifically labeled for cats on your feline friend. Canine flea control products can be deadly to cats. It may also be helpful to use an aerosol spray product in the house to kill eggs and larvae in the environment, but follow the directions closely to avoid toxic exposure to people and pets.

Fleas are a big problem, not only in the summer, but all year long. Treating your pet every month with a safe, approved topical flea product is the best way to keep him or her safe throughout the year. If your pet has managed to get fleas, don't despair. Don't get discouraged, keep treating and remember the flea life cycle. Fleas don't disappear in a few days. See your veterinarian to discuss the best ways to combat fleas and don't give up the fight! For more information, see "Fleas: Know Your Enemy" on [www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com).

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