

Understanding Fleas and Flea Control

The most common cause of itching in dogs and cats is the flea. Pets which are allergic to flea saliva, called flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), may be intensely itchy with rare exposure, while non-allergic pets may be heavily infested and show little or no discomfort. Flea control is especially important when pets have a flea allergy.

The Flea Life Cycle

The life cycle of the flea is influenced mainly by humidity and temperature. Because humidity is the most important factor, fleas can still reproduce and infest pets in colder months by maintaining their life cycles inside of homes.

- *Eggs*: production begins 24-48 hours after a flea's first blood meal. Females can lay 40-50 eggs per day in the pet's coat. The eggs drop anywhere the infested host goes.
- *Larvae*: stage begins within 1-6 days of egg production. Larvae are mobile and free-living and feed on organic debris, adult flea feces and other larvae.
- *Pupae*: flea larvae wrap themselves within silk-like cocoons. These can be found in soil, under vegetation, in carpets, under furniture, and on bedding. Due to their sticky nature, environmental debris usually coats the cocoon. This makes it the most resistant stage to flea treatment products. Depending on environmental stimuli,

fleas can remain in this phase between 21-90 days.

- *Adults*: newly emerged adults are attracted to pets by body temperature, movement, light and carbon dioxide.

Feeding begin almost immediately upon finding a host. Adults prefer pets, but will target humans when the infestation grows too large for the household pets to host.

What Can I Do?

Flea control products are the best method for the treatment and prevention of fleas.

These products contain adulticides and insect growth regulators to break the life cycle of the fleas. However, the pupae stage is not affected, therefore, it is important to consistently apply flea control products monthly to break the life cycles.

Remember:

- Successful flea control requires constant and continuous treatment
- All pets need to be treated monthly to prevent infestation
- Effective flea control requires treatment of the pet and its environment (interior of house, yard, etc.)
- All flea products are not created equal. Ask your veterinarian for which products to use

