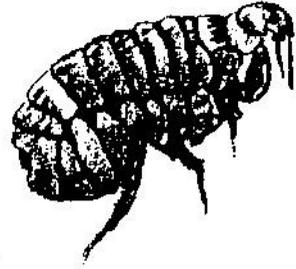


Fleas



*An Itch You
Can Scratch!*



Fleas



An itch you can scratch!

Fleas developed on earth thousands of years ago and have adapted many survival techniques. In Louisiana these insects are a pest in and around homes and on pets and other animals year round.

Some fleas tend to be somewhat host specific. That is, dog fleas usually get on dogs, rodent fleas on rodents and cat fleas on cats. However, cat fleas tend to use any host available. All will feed on other hosts, including humans, but they usually prefer their specific host. Therefore, fleas that are brought into the house and yard are from dogs, cats and rodents. There are many other species of fleas.

Fleas feed by siphoning blood through piercing mouthparts which contain salivary and food tubes. Only adult fleas feed on the host. They can survive several weeks and even months without food. It is important to note that fleas spend most of their life cycle off the host animal. This means if fleas are left in an area after a host animal is removed, they can wait patiently for the next host to move into the area.

The female flea must have a blood meal before she can lay fertile eggs. She will then lay several hundred pearly eggs and larvae hatch in three to 15 days. The little white grub-looking worms mature in **15 to 30 days**. The eggs are usually laid on the host and then drop onto the bed of the host or onto the flooring where the larvae will feed on the dust, dried blood and organic matter in and around the sleeping area of the host (bedding, dust in carpet, cracks in floor, molding, etc.). The larvae do not suck blood, so they are not animal pests.

Fleas seem to have a built-in mechanism for survival. For example, if an egg is in a good environment with the proper amount of moisture and proper temperature, the larva may hatch in as few as three days. The same thing is true of the larval stage of the flea. If it has good food and an optimum environment in which to live, the flea will develop from an egg into an adult in about two and a half to three weeks. In poor conditions, it may take six to eight months to become an adult.

Ideal conditions for the flea development include a temperature of 80 to 90 degrees F, adequate moisture and sufficient organic matter for food of larvae. When these conditions exist, the flea can complete its life cycle in 18 to 21 days. The adult flea itself will live from several weeks to several months.

Flea problems may be seasonal or nonseasonal, depending on geographical and environmental factors. In the northern United States, the problem may be seasonal; fleas tend to occur year round in the South.

Injury to Pets

Fleas can cause skin disease with their biting. This can result in infection or produce an allergic response. The flea is well known for producing an allergic response in the dog or cat. Substances in the flea saliva can produce allergic skin disease. For animals highly sensitive to the flea, only one or two may cause intense itching and disease. Several fleas may be present and not produce an intense problem on animals with allergy. Heavy infestations in small puppies and kittens have caused anemia because of blood loss.

Diagnosis of the flea infestation is usually based on the physical findings and history. The distribution of lesions, presence of fleas, flea dirt (fecal material) and tape worm segments (Dipylidium) are evidence of a flea infestation. Tapeworms cannot exist without fleas being present to start the cycle.

Many people who had thought their pet could not possibly have fleas find out about the infestation this way. The tapeworm segment breaks open releasing its eggs. A larval flea consumes the egg along with the flea dirt that it normally eats. As the larval flea matures, so does the baby tapeworm. When a grooming dog or cat licks the flea and swallows it, the dead flea is digested in the dog's stomach releasing the baby tapeworm. The tapeworm is passed to its new home in the dog or cat's small intestine where it attaches and lives its life.

Suppression of clinical signs of flea-induced skin disease in the animal may be possible with flea control alone. If symptoms persist, consult a veterinarian.

Control Measures

Flea control can be difficult because it usually takes two to three applications of the proper insecticide to get good control. One application of an insecticide on the surface or in the area where the fleas are will not take care of the problem. To control fleas, always apply at least two to three applications at 10 to 12-day intervals. The animal, its bedding and the area where the animal spends most of its time should be treated.

Insecticides to Use

Several insecticides are cleared for controlling fleas and when used properly they give good control. Orthene, Carbaryl, and Pyrethrins are three of the most common insecticides you can use. Use them according to the rate and directions on the labels. The label is the law.

Those who would rather not spray, but who want to control fleas, may want to use a fogger, sometimes called a “flea bomb”. There are many of these ready-to-use (RTU) products on the market. Some contain an adulticide (kill adult fleas); others will kill only larvae and eggs. Two insecticides that will kill larvae and eggs only are sold as **Precor** (methoprene) and **phenoxycarb**. Methoprene and phenoxycarb are both growth regulators that prevent the larvae from emerging from eggs or otherwise prevent the immature flea from reaching adulthood.

Before using any flea control insecticide indoors, the infested area should be thoroughly vacuumed and the contents of the vacuum cleaner bag discarded. Put the vacuum cleaner bag in a plastic bag, tie the plastic bag and put the plastic bag in a trash can outside.

For use inside the home, several insecticides are available. Included are baygon, malathion, and pyrethrins as well as many premixes that are bought off the shelf ready to use. An important consideration to the use of any of these products is how they will affect the interior of your home. Before using on carpet, wallpaper, and many types of vinyl flooring, it is recommended to try these sprays on a small portion of that material in non visible area. Observe this area for discoloration effects before using on the entire floor or wall area of your home. As always with small children and

infants, be even more cautious in applications, and also in evacuation and re-entry times of the home before, during, and after insecticide applications. Read labels for application information and pre-cautionary statements.

A vital part of getting rid of fleas is controlling them on the host. Obtain a shampoo dip or treatment from a veterinarian or veterinary supply store, and dip or treat the animal as recommended or obtain a flea collar or impregnated medallion.

One of the most important factors in putting a **flea collar** on a dog or cat is getting the collar tight enough. The way a flea collar works is that a flea will usually, during a 24-hour period, move over the entire animal. If the collar is loose, the flea may not come in contact with the collar enough to get a lethal dose of the insecticide. The collar should be tight enough so that the flea does come in contact with it when it crawls.

Two rub-on products are on the market and can be obtained from your veterinarian. **Advantage** comes in a little tube and is applied between the shoulders of the pet and rubbed in. The dose is based on the animal’s weight. With this product the flea does not have to bite the dog for the insecticide to affect it. This product is absorbed in the animal’s body and released in hair follicles to give contact control on the fleas.

Front Line comes in a bottle with a pump for spraying the animal’s fur. Rub the chemical into the fur. Use rubber gloves when applying the chemical and be sure to keep it out of animal’s eyes. With this product, the flea must bite the dog to affect it.

No insecticide kills fleas instantly. Allow two to three days for them to work. Remember, too, that fleas will get on animals when they are outside. Don’t expect your dog or

cat to be 100% flea-free if it’s allowed to go outside. However, if you keep a treatment or flea collar on your pet and treat it as directed, fleas should not be a problem in and around your home.



Outdoor Flea Control

To control fleas outdoors, it’s important to use the proper rate of the insecticide in enough water to cover and wet the entire area. Coverage is very important and can only be accomplished through the use of plenty of water to thoroughly wet the area!

It is also important to remember the flea life cycle, and the fact that eggs usually mature in 15 to 30 days, but this time could be greatly shortened or extended by the environmental conditions. This means that we will have to make multiple sprays to get extended and more complete control or suppression. You may thoroughly spray the yard area and wipe out the entire flea populations today. In as little as 3 days, through the hatching of eggs, visiting dogs, cats, and rodents, and the movement of your pets in other areas, you could have the same or worse infestation as you started with. In severe infestations 3 to 4 applications may be needed every 5 to 10 days. The recurring buildup of the populations will alert you as to when to re-spray.

Products that may be used outdoors for flea control include: Orthene, Carbaryl, Pyrethrins, Pyrethroids, Scimitar, Turcam, and several pre-mixes that may be purchased ready to use off the shelf. Again, good coverage and plenty of water to wet the area are essential to a successful spray program.

It is rare that an entire yard needs treating. Usually only the immediate area where the animal spends most of its time will need to be treated.

Successful control of fleas in and around the home demands we use a multi-faceted approach which include the following management tools:

On pets - use a flea collar, rub-on product, and/or regular dipping and bathing, as well as checking the pet regularly for adult fleas and tapeworms.

In home - check pet beds, keep these areas clean and sprayed, as well as other parts of the home if necessary.

Outside and lawn area - pesticide usage in yard, around buildings, etc. and control movement of stray cats, dogs, and rodents, in and around the yard to prevent re-infestation.



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