

# Fleas

Fleas are a small wingless insect that infest animals. There are over 2,200 species of fleas! Fleas are **fairly species specific** (though cat fleas can infest dogs and vice versa) and **CANNOT infest humans**. However, if your pet is heavily infested then they may jump on you and bite you- though trust us, you are not their type.

Fleas cause scratching and irritation and ***we can see pets biting around their legs and base of their tail or scratching their neck***- the most common areas fleas like to camp out. This is usually accompanied by fur loss and scabs in these areas too. **Occasionally, we don't see live fleas on your pet** and all we see is skin irritation, fur loss, flea poop (aka "flea dirt"), and/or tapeworms because most pets (especially cats) lick and groom themselves and end up eating the fleas.

## **Life Cycle:**

Fleas lay eggs on your pet where they hatch into larvae. These tiny larvae can move around and deposit into carpet, blankets, bedding, and in the crevices of hard surfaces. The **typical flea life cycle is usually a maximum of 3 MONTHS long** but in some unique circumstances can last up to 350 days!

## **Potential Side Effects:**

-Some **pets can develop allergies to fleas** - causing fur loss, skin infections and hives. It can take as little as one flea bite to cause an allergic reaction so in these pets **we highly recommend flea prevention all year round**.

-**Fleas can transmit tapeworms**- these look like little rice granules in your pet's poop or sometimes you can see them crawling around their rectum- I know, it's gross but true! We highly recommend bringing in the stool sample so we can verify these worms as it requires a specific kind of deworming medication. The good news is that **you cannot get tapeworms from your pets, only from ingesting the fleas themselves**- so try not to eat any! If you do suspect that you have contracted tapeworms please see your primary care physician.

## **Treatment:**

**Treat the pet:** The best treatment is a flea preventative product- and I generally recommend prescription products as over-the-counter products are not always as affective. There are various topical and oral products available to choose from and we can work to see which will work best for your pet. ***Since the life cycle is 3 months long, you MUST keep your pet on prevention for at least three months.*** Keep in mind that some over-the-counter products are NOT preventatives- meaning they kill the current fleas on your pet but only last 24 hours unlike preventative products that usually last ~30+ days. **Also, all pets in the household need to be put on flea and tick preventative.** If one pet is diagnosed with it then the others are sure to be infested as well.

**Treat the environment:** Usually, flea-bombing the house is not necessary unless there are multiple pets with severe infestation. In general, good hygiene is enough in helping get rid of the fleas. This means **WEEKLY vacuuming, sweeping, cleaning, and washing any blankets your pet has been on.**

**NEVER USE A DOG FLEA/TICK PRODUCT ON A CAT AS THAT CAN BE DEADLY- IF YOU EVER ACCIDENTALLY USE A DOG PRODUCT ON A CAT, THEN TAKE THE CAT TO AN EMERGENCY VETERINARIAN IMMEDIATELY.**

# Fleas- FAQ

## **Does My Pet Need Flea Prevention in the Winter?**

In general cold *can* kill fleas; HOWEVER, guess where fleas like to go when it's cold? **INSIDE**. We sometimes see more flea cases in the winter than in the summer as this is when owners tend to take their pets off prevention.

## **My Pet is an Indoor Only Pet, How Did They Get Fleas?**

Although they cannot infest humans, they can jump on your clothes and hitch a ride into your house.

## **Can I Use Coconut Oil or Apple Cider Vinegar to Treat the Fleas?**

**No**, I highly recommend against it. Bacteria and yeast LOVE coconut oil and it can create a great environment for a nasty skin infection. Apple cider vinegar tends to be irritating and cause pets to lick/scratch more and then they can create an infection as well. Ingesting too much of either of these can also cause your pet to have severe vomiting, diarrhea or even give them pancreatitis. **NEITHER OF THESE PRODCUTS DO ANYTHING FOR FLEAS**-your pet will just continue to have fleas and a bad skin infection.

## **Can I Use Diatomaceous Earth?**

I recommend against it. This is another popular “natural remedy” that owners read about. Various studies have shown that diatomaceous earth **can reduce the number of fleas on a pet** in a flea infestation by essentially drying out the fleas. **HOWEVER, it does not get rid of fleas completely AND this product can be very irritating to your pet's eyes, ears, and lungs**. If you insist on using a product like this please start with small amounts (avoiding their eyes/ears and mouth) and monitor for reactions first.

## **Can I Get Fleas?**

As previously stated- **no**. Fleas are pretty species specific - they may bite you but they cannot infest you. If you do have any concerns please see your primary care physician.

## **Can I Get Tapeworms From My Pet?**

You cannot get tapeworms from your pet. You CAN technically get them if you eat any fleas- so no snacking on those little buggers. If you do have any further concerns please see your primary care physician.

## **Can I use the medicine for my dog on my cat too?**

**ABSOLUTELY NOT!** This can kill your cat! DO NOT give a dog flea product to a cat EVER. If this does happen take your cat to an emergency veterinarian immediately!!

**LEGALLY, PRESCRIPTIONS CAN NOT BE PRESCRIBED IF THE PET HAS NOT BEEN SEEN BY THE PRESCRIBING VETERINARIAN. THUS IN MULTI-PET HOUSEHOLDS EACH PET REQUIRES A VETERINARY VISIT.**

**AS ALWAYS, IF YOU EVER HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO BRING THEM UP TO YOUR VETERINARIAN. THE INTERNET CAN BE FULL OF A LOT OF INFORMATION, BUT ONLY YOUR VETERINARIAN CAN HELP YOU SORT OUT THE GOOD AND BAD RESOURCES**