

Fleas are the most common external parasite found on cats [\(and dogs\)](#). (Parasites are "freeloaders" that live in or on another creature.) Although fleas are more likely to be a problem during warm-weather months, they can also cause problems during cooler seasons due to their ability to continue their life cycle indoors.

How will fleas affect my cat?

You will probably first notice the effects of fleas when your cat repeatedly nibbles and licks its haircoat and skin. On occasion you may see tiny brown fleas moving quickly through your cat's haircoat. Cats are very skilled groomers, however, and may remove fleas so well that you do not see them. Your cat's constant nibbling and licking may lead to noticeable patches of hair loss, tiny crusts (called miliary dermatitis by your veterinarian), and reddened, irritated skin. Fleas may also cause skin allergies and can transmit other parasites, such as tapeworms, to your cat. How do I check my cat for fleas?

Adult fleas are usually more difficult to find on cats than on dogs. One of the best methods for checking your cat for fleas is to look for flea dirt (actually flea feces) in your cat's haircoat using a flea comb.

To check for flea dirt, briskly comb or rub a section of the hair on your cat's back while your cat is sitting or lying on a white piece of paper. If your cat has fleas, black flecks that look like dirt (as a result, we use the term "flea dirt") will fall onto the paper. If you transfer these black flecks to a damp piece of paper, in a short time they will appear red or rust-colored. The red color results because blood sucked from your cat is passed in the flea's waste matter. If the dirt specks do not turn red, then they are probably "regular" dirt.

How do I prevent my cat from getting fleas?

Indoors

To control fleas, you must stop them from reproducing. Carpets, pet bedding, furniture, wood floors, and other indoor areas where your cat spends much time will contain the highest number of developing fleas. Frequent vacuuming of these areas (throw the vacuum cleaner bag away afterwards) and frequent washing of pet bedding can greatly reduce the number of developing fleas inside your home.

Outdoors

Fleas also develop in shady, protected outdoor areas, although the outdoor areas are usually of less concern to pet owners who only have cats and do not have dogs. Most flea problems can be managed by treating and preventing fleas right on your cat. Remember that dogs and cats can share fleas, so be sure that dogs in your house are treated, too. It is important to remember that flea problems may be different from pet to pet or between households, and each problem may require a special method of control.

Steps to Take

See your veterinarian for advice on your specific situation. Your veterinarian can recommend safe and effective products for controlling and killing fleas and can determine exactly what you need. Your veterinarian can also determine whether you should consult with a pest control specialist about treating your home and yard or recommending products that will break the flea life cycle in the environment. We prefer OTC CHERISTIN for cats for fleas only and Revolution or Revolution Plus. Do not use toxic flea collars. Seresto collars are effective but their break away mechanism can be faulty and has killed dogs and cats. There are TONS of flea products; many can be toxic, ineffective, kill cats and we recommend talking to your vet about a flea product before application.

For veterinary professionals, more detailed information on fleas can be found at <https://www.capevet.org/guidelines/fleas/>.

Did you know?

- You may see fleas in your home or on your cat, or simply see your cat nibbling at and licking itself.
- If not treated, you cat may suffer patches of hair loss or reddened, irritated skin. Fleas can also carry other parasites.
- Frequent vacuuming and/or washing of pet bedding, carpets and furniture can help control fleas.
- Cats and dogs can share fleas.

- Flea treatments for your cat can protect it and break the flea life cycle.

Tapeworms from Fleas

Tapeworms are long, flat worms that attach themselves to your cat's intestines. A tapeworm body consists of multiple parts, or segments, each with its own reproductive organs. Tapeworm infections are usually diagnosed by finding segments—which appear as small white worms that may look like grains of rice or seeds—on the rear end of your cat, in your cat's feces, or where your cat lives and sleeps.

There are several different species of tapeworms that may infect your cat, each with stage(s) in a different intermediate (in-between) host, which the cat eats. Some use fleas as the intermediate host; others use small rodents, such as mice and squirrels, as intermediate hosts.

How will tapeworms affect my cat?

Cats rarely show any signs associated with tapeworm infection though vomiting and diarrhea can be seen. Some cats can develop an intestinal obstruction that could result in death as well.

How do I prevent my cat from getting tapeworms?

Try to keep your cat from coming in contact with intermediate hosts that contain tapeworm larvae. **Because fleas are an intermediate host for the most common kind of tapeworm, flea control is an essential prevention measure.**

If you think your cat is infected with tapeworms, call your veterinarian for an appointment to get an accurate diagnosis and safe, effective treatment options. We recommend Praziquantel since this is the only product that will control tapeworms from fleas. There are oral praziquantel products along with topicals like Profender, BUT since 1-4% of cats can have MDR-1 mutations, we do not recommend use of Profender without a test for the mutation first.

Can humans be harmed by tapeworms?

Certain tapeworms found in dogs or cats may cause serious disease in humans. Fortunately, these tapeworms (*Echinococcus species*) are uncommon in the United States and are readily treated by prescriptions available from your veterinarian. There are rare reports of *Dipylidium* (a common tapeworm in pets) infections in children, but these infections are not associated with significant disease.

Did you know?

- Most tapeworms do not produce obvious symptoms in cats, other than worm segments on your cat's rear end or feces.
- Cats can get tapeworms from fleas, mice, or other rodents.
- Flea control is an important step in protecting your cat from tapeworms.
- People rarely are affected by cat tapeworms.
- Other kinds of worms that cats can get include heartworms, hookworms, and roundworms.