

## FLEA CONTROL

Provided by East Central Veterinarians

### ***My cat or dog has fleas. What can I do?***

To be effective, you must deal with the environment as well and the fleas on your dog. Why? Although the adult fleas on your pet are the most obvious, they represent only 5% of the total flea problem in your home. 95% of the total flea population associated with your pet is in the environment.

Successful flea control involves:

1. Eliminating fleas from your pet
2. Eliminating/preventing fleas on the other dogs and cats in your home
3. Controlling fleas in the environment



Dogs and cats share the same fleas. It is important that all pets in your home are on a flea preventive.

When it comes to environmental control, we must first understand the flea life cycle.

### ***There are four stages in the life cycle of the flea:***

**Flea eggs** are whitish and about 0.5 millimeter (mm) (1/32") in length. They are unlikely to be seen without a magnifying glass. Eggs are laid by the adult flea after taking a blood meal. The eggs are initially laid on the dog's skin but fall off into the environment to continue their life cycle. Flea eggs

constitute approximately 50% of the total flea population. Eggs may hatch in as little as 14 to 28 days, depending on environmental conditions. High humidity and temperature favor rapid hatching

**Flea larvae** are about 2-5 mm (1/8" to 1/4") in length. They feed on organic debris found in their environment and on adult flea feces. They dislike bright light and move deep into carpet fibers or under furniture, organic debris, grass, branches, leaves and soil. Flea larvae prefer warm, dark and moist areas. Outdoor larval development occurs only in shaded, moist areas where flea infested pets spend a significant amount of time. Our climate-controlled homes offer an ideal environment for the flea larvae to thrive.

The **flea pupae** produce a protective silk-like cocoon which is sticky. It quickly becomes coated with grime and debris, which acts as a useful camouflage. With warmth and humidity, pupae become adult fleas in 5-10 days. The adults do not emerge from the cocoon unless stimulated by physical pressure, carbon dioxide or heat. This is important since once fleas emerge from the cocoon they can only exist for a few days unless they are able to feed. Pre-emergent adult fleas can survive within the cocoon for up to 9 months. During this time, they are resistant to insecticides applied to the environment. This is important to remember because adult fleas may emerge into the environment a considerable time after you apply insecticides in your home.

Once it emerges, the **flea adult**, unlike the larvae, is attracted to light and heads to the surface in order to encounter a passing host to feed upon. Two days after the first blood meal, female fleas begin egg production. In normal circumstances the adult female will live up to three weeks, laying approximately 40 eggs per day. The entire life cycle, from egg to adult flea can be completed in 14-28 days depending on environmental conditions.

### ***Apart from irritation, are fleas particularly harmful?***

Fleas can cause anemia in heavy infestations, especially in young or debilitated dogs. A single female flea can take up to 15 times her body weight in blood over the several weeks of her adult life. In addition, fleas can carry several diseases, including plague, and also act as vectors to spread one of the most common tapeworms of the dog and cat, *Dipylidium caninum*.

### ***How do I prevent fleas on my dog?***

Nexgard (oral flea and tick medication) or Simperica TRIO (oral flea, tick, and heartworm medication), are the most effective options for dogs because of the ingredients and it cannot be washed off. Frontline Gold, a topical over the counter medication, is another good option. These products need to be used every 30 days year round.



### ***How do I prevent fleas on my cat?***

Revolution Plus, a monthly topical flea and tick medication is the most effective for cats. Effipro is another good option. These products need to be used every 30 days year round.

### ***How do I treat fleas on my pet?***

We treat fleas with the same product we use to prevent fleas. It is critical that all dogs and cats are treated with an appropriate flea medication on the same day. It takes a minimum of 4 consecutive months of treatment to clear a home of fleas. If the area has a lot of fleas and flea eggs it can take more than 6 months.

### ***What about the environment?***

Treating the pet's environment is a critical step in addressing the fleas on your pet and in your home.

- ❖ Vacuum every day to remove eggs, larvae and adults; this is the best method for initial control of flea infestation. Pay particular attention to areas where pets sleep and lay.
  - Be sure to discard the vacuum cleaner bag after its use.
  - Bagless vacuums need to be emptied in an outdoor trash can each time after you vacuum.
  - Be sure to vacuum the following areas: carpets, cushioned furniture, cracks and crevices on floors, along baseboards and the basement.

- ❖ Environmental products - make sure to use as directed by the manufacturer.
  - Before applying any environmental product, we recommend vacuuming your carpet to stimulate the pre-adult fleas to emerge from their protective cocoons. Be sure to discard the vacuum cleaner bag after its use.
- ❖ Steam clean carpets: the hot steam and soap can kill fleas.
  - Pay particular attention to areas where pets sleep.
- ❖ Wash all pet bedding, cloth toys, and family bedding on which pets lie in hot, soapy water every two to three weeks.
- ❖ If an infestation is severe, discard old pet bedding and replace it with fresh, clean material.

***My pet lives most of their life outside. What should I do?***

Concentrate on dark, shaded areas. Spray a product containing an Insect Growth Regulator (IGR) and repeat every 14-21 days for three to five applications.

**With persistence and patience, your home and your pet can become flea-free again.**