

Treatment and prevention

If you already have a flea problem then there are two main aims of treatment:

1. Kill any adult fleas on your pet to stop them biting;
2. Break the flea life cycle to stop more adult fleas hatching out.

Once you have identified a problem you will have to ensure rigorous flea control for a **further 12 months** before you can be confident that you have resolved it.

There are a variety of preparations available to control and prevent fleas, these include:

- spot on solutions
- tablets
- collars
- sprays
- injections

Reducing the number of fleas in the environment is very important and household flea sprays designed for this purpose can be very effective.

The pupal stages of the flea life cycle can be very resistant to destruction. To maximise the effect of these sprays try doing the following the day before you use them:

- place damp towels over hot radiators to raise the temperature and increase humidity.
- vacuum the carpet to create vibrations.

And finally...

- Fleas remain a common problem for our pets in the UK.
- Preventing an infestation is important, so flea treatments should be an integral part of your pet's parasite control program.
- Not all available products are effective at treating and preventing flea infestations.

Please speak to the staff at your veterinary practice for advice on the best treatment available for your pet.



XLVets Small Animal member veterinary practices work together to share experience, knowledge and ideas to ensure the highest levels of quality and care for their client's pets. XLVet member practices provide a compassionate and caring service for all pets and at the same time offer comprehensive and up-to-date treatment in all fields of veterinary medicine and surgery.



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FLEAS

Identification, treatment and prevention



What are fleas?

Fleas are a very common problem for many pet owners that can exist all year round and in some animals can be the cause of unpleasant skin conditions. This leaflet will help you understand how to identify fleas, how to treat them and how to prevent them becoming a problem in your home.

What are fleas?

A flea is a small, reddish brown, wingless insect, which feeds off the blood of mammals. This can include pets such as our dogs, cats and rabbits but can also include tasty humans.

Although they are small they can be seen with the naked eye and are about 1-3 mm long. They have flat bodies and very powerful back legs which mean they can jump huge distances for their size.



A flea seen under the microscope

Flea compared to size of a penny

The Flea Life Cycle



1. An adult flea can start to lay eggs within 24 hours of its first meal on your pet.
2. The eggs will fall off your pet and into the environment where they hatch and develop into larvae, similar to small caterpillars.
3. The larvae then develop into the next stage of the cycle called a pupa which can stick very tightly to the fibres in carpets and soft furnishings. This stage can last a very long time; sometimes the pupa may take nearly a year to hatch into the new adult. It is also a part of the life cycle that is very resistant to products designed to stop flea infestations.
4. Adult fleas will hatch from the pupa in response to certain conditions. These include warmth, humidity, movement and carbon dioxide.

Spot the Signs

If your dog or cat is itching or you have felt yourself being bitten take a few minutes to do the following simple checks:

Part the fur on your pet and look closely at the skin surface. Fleas will leave behind faeces which look like small black grains of sand or little comma shapes.



Brush the coat with a very fine toothed flea comb, this will collect the debris.



Put these coat brushings on a wet piece of white paper and wait for a minute. If flea dirt is present then the faeces (which are dried blood) will dissolve and create reddish brown streaks on the paper.



Other problems caused by fleas

Flea Allergic Dermatitis (FAD)

Some pets can be allergic to fleas. In these cases even a single flea bite can cause the animal to be very itchy and uncomfortable. Over-grooming as a response to irritation can lead to hair loss and shortened rough patches of fur on the body. This is most commonly seen on their backs near the base of the tail. Small scabs and red patches can also be present following excessive trauma which in severe cases may become infected

Tapeworm infection

One type of tapeworm, *Dipylidium caninum* cannot complete its lifecycle without the involvement of the flea. Although the tapeworm is unlikely to cause severe illness in the majority of pets it is possible that in some cases humans can become infected too. It is very important therefore that any pet which is showing signs of fleas is also treated for tapeworms.

Myxomatosis in rabbits

This disease is nearly always fatal and currently affects a large part of the wild rabbit population. Fleas are able to transmit this disease between wild and domestic rabbits so it is important to try and minimise contact between them. Myxomatosis can be prevented with regular vaccination.

