

# Thwart those fleas! Step up the attack

Fleas are one of the most common problems affecting our pets, and flea-related diseases account for more than 50% of dermatological cases that veterinarians see.

**Bruce Waddell** at Willows Veterinary Group gives some tips on how to tackle them

A flea infestation can affect the general well-being of all animals and is associated with a number of health problems. Fleas prefer warm, humid conditions and are often attracted to dogs and cats by their vibrations, body heat and exhaled carbon dioxide.

Once on a pet, they can spread anywhere that the pet goes, including its owner's house and any house it visits. Fleas feed on the blood of their hosts and, while feeding, they inject irritating substances into the skin that can cause a skin irritation or allergy.

As well as being irritating to your pet, fleas can also transmit infectious diseases, which make them a threat to the health of both animals and humans. It is therefore of paramount importance that all pet owners have a regime of flea control for their pets. Despite this, statistics reveal that only 10% of dog owners and 20% of cat owners use a flea treatment monthly.

Adult fleas jump onto a cat or dog, where they produce eggs. Eggs drop from the pet into the environment, where they develop into larvae, pupae and then adult fleas. This life cycle can be completed in as little as 14 days or be last up to around four or five months, depending on environmental temperature and humidity.

Any household pet that goes outside may bring back fleas into the home. Fleas are extremely difficult to see with the naked eye and many owners do not realise when



Bruce Waddell looks for signs of flea infestation

they have an infestation.

Environmental conditions have a significant impact on the risk of flea infestation. In cool, dry conditions fleas will remain in their cocoons as pre-emergent adults until activated to emerge by warmer temperatures and/or host stimuli. Each year, the warm weather of spring causes millions of blood-thirsty fleas to hatch. In hot, humid conditions, fleas will develop faster.

As a result many owners think they only need to apply flea prevention treatments in summer but as the warm temperature and humidity in homes provide a perfect

microclimate for the flea life cycle controlling fleas is a year-round necessity.

The secret to flea control and prevention is breaking the flea life cycle. Flea eggs, larvae and adults can be killed by various methods; only the pupae remain relatively untreatable. Pets can still pick up adult fleas from another source and start the life cycle all over again. This is why regular application is needed to prevent a re-occurrence of the problem.

There are many flea control products available; adulticides which kill adult fleas, insect growth regulators which prevent larvae from

developing into adults, and/or insect development inhibitors which prevent the eggs from hatching.

The main treatments are:

#### Topical adulticide formulations

- Applying a small amount of spot on liquid adulticide to the skin of the pet will kill adult fleas and provide long-lasting flea control;
- Some products also contain imidacloprid which also kills larvae wherever the pet goes;
- It is important to only use products labelled for cats on cats and for dogs on dogs;
- Owners find these products easy to use.

#### Systemic medications

- Some products contain insecticidal materials that are transported to the skin through the animal's blood;
- Medication can be administered as a tablet or injection.

#### Flea control collars

- Collars may contain an insecticide.

To minimise the risk of an infestation, pet owners should also pay attention to the pet's environment. Regular and thorough cleaning of floors and furniture where fleas (eggs, larvae, pupae, adults) may be lurking is



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essential. Vacuum bags should be sealed and discarded after every cleaning to prevent eggs from hatching or adults escaping.

Regular laundering of pet bedding and other items in hot, soapy water and drying in hot air will also help get rid of fleas.

Following an infestation it is recommended that owners use an environmental spray containing insect growth regulators.

**For more information contact the Willows Veterinary Group in Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1LP. Tel: 01606 723 204.**



## TIPS FOR SQPS

- 1 Always check the weight of the animal
- 2 Check that the customer is not buying the product to use on multi species – some dog products can be lethal if used on cats.
- 3 If the animal has a severe flea infestation advise the customer to speak to their vet
- 4 Give advice on the frequency of use