

Flea Facts & Information

- 5% of the fleas will be found on pets
- 10% flea cocoons found in carpets
- 35% flea larvae found in carpets
- 50% flea eggs found in carpets

Fleas have been around for millions of years, feeding on the blood of animals and humans. Fleas live on pets, mammals, pet bedding, in carpets, in sofas as well as other household and farm goods.

Whether it be animal or human when something warm moves by the pupae, they unzip the cocoons and jump on for the ride. All of this can happen in a short period of time.

- Fleas feed on blood and a flea can live without a blood meal for 100 days.
- A female flea has to have a blood meal to lay eggs.
- Eggs are laid within 36-48 hours of having the first blood meal.
- A female flea can lay 2,000 eggs in her lifetime.

Fleas are very tiny creatures, the adults average 1/8th of an inch in size. They have a flat body from side to side, with piercing mouths that help them in sucking blood. Fleas are often confused with bed bugs, lice and ticks. However, fleas are reddish brown to black in appearance and they are also wingless.



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Fact Sheet



Fleas

**Are you
and your
surroundings
at risk?**

Fleas are highly specialized bloodsucking parasites belonging to the order of insects called Siphonaptera, which means "Wingless Siphon". They have a formidable reputation of claiming more victims than all the wars ever fought, as a result of the "bubonic plague" they spread throughout the world in the 14th century causing the deaths of over 200 million people. Now, these insects are better known for their irritation and pest status world wide.

**Let us help develop a
Flea Control Plan that
will work for you.**

Stop Flea Infestation!



Some fleas can attack a range of hosts, and their ability to transfer from one host to another allows for the possible transfer of pathogens including viral, bacterial and parasitic diseases.

A flea-borne disease that currently occurs

within Australia is murine typhus; this is transmitted from rats to humans by particular rat fleas, typically *Xenopsylla cheopis*, and although it has been widespread, it is uncommon.

What diseases do fleas transmit?

- a tapeworm called *Dipylidium caninum*
- *Haemobartonellosis* which effects red blood cells
- a parasite called *Dipetalonema reconditum*
- Plague caused by *Yersinia pestis*
- Typhus caused by *Rickettsia typhi*
- Tularemia caused by *Francisella tularensis*

The continual biting activity of fleas alone causes a great deal of irritation and distress to humans, especially during flea plagues. Reactions to the flea's saliva are often delayed, with the formation of a wheal surrounding each puncture site within 5-30 minutes of the bite, accompanied by intense itching. Within 12-24 hours each wheal may progress to a small lesion of vesicle. The onset of symptoms in sensitized individuals often develops much later, and the initial reaction may become apparent only after 12-24 hours. Fleas are the major cause of papular urticaria, particularly on the legs of children, and continual scratching may lead to secondary infections.

- Fleas are light brown to mahogany in color and roughly oval shaped. Their laterally flattened appearance enables them to quickly move through the host's hair. Measuring 2-8 mm in length, the adults are entirely covered with a series of bristles and combs that assists them in clinging to the host. The small head is equipped with sawing and sucking mouthparts, and two tiny simple eyes. To aid in the detection of a host, fleas possess two short antennae

on the head that are sensitive to stimuli including heat, vibration, traces of carbon dioxide and change in air currents and shadows. The hind pair of legs that are well developed for jumping enables fleas to be propelled 10 - 30 cms, either to make contact with a host or avoid a threatening situation.



Many pets get flea problems - all it takes is one flea in your house for you to get a serious flea problem.

- Both female and male fleas rely on blood for their nutrition, but can survive for several months without it.

- Fleas will bite only accessible parts of the body and clustered bites on the lower limbs are diagnostic. Blood feeding maybe interrupted, and fleas will often probe several times.

- Each female flea uses her blood to nourish developing eggs, and will deposit up to 4 eggs after each blood meal; most females will lay at least 100 eggs within a life cycle of several months.

- Eggs are oval, white to cream in color and measure 0.5mm in length; they can hatch within 1 week, but this will be dependent on prevailing conditions as larvae are extremely sensitive to desiccation.

- Within a 1-3 week period, the larvae will grow and undergo 4 moults prior to pupating in a silken cocoon which they spin. The adult fleas emerge from the pupal case in 1-2 weeks but can remain dormant in their cocoons for several months depending on the availability of food and conditions.

- Often the emergence of adults from the pupal stage is triggered by vibrations, which occasionally happens on entering an unoccupied home of previous pet owners.

What symptoms are caused by fleas and how is a flea infestation diagnosed?

- Flea bites themselves may be unnoticeable on some pets, cause slight irritation in others and produce

severe itching, red lesions, hair loss and even ulcers in a third group. The severe lesions are caused by a hypersensitivity to the flea saliva and is called flea allergy dermatitis.

- Large numbers of fleas can cause anemia, especially in puppies and kittens. Some pets have been known to die if the anemia is severe.

The diagnosis of a flea infestation can be made by finding the adult fleas or "flea dirt" on the animal. The best places to use a flea comb to detect fleas is around the hindquarters and head of the pet. These same areas should be examined for the "flea dirt". After using the flea comb, transfer any debris found on the comb to a piece of white paper towel and moisten it. If the "dirt" dissolves into a red color, it is "flea dirt".

Treatment & Control

With the increase in carpeted homes, central heating and number of household pets, flea control is a continuing problem for pest controllers and pet owners. The prolonged periods of warm, humid weather in the summer months provide ideal conditions for fleas to



flourish. Typically, concentrations of the immature stages of fleas (eggs and larvae) will be found in areas where pets feed and rest, and control measures should be targeted at any such areas, in addition to their housing, basket, blankets and the pets themselves. Fleas can also be brought in by rats and mice. They can hop a ride on your pants legs or socks when entering the house. When treating

house and yard both need to be considered a breeding ground. Regular vacuuming of floors are recommended.

- **Pet Bedding-** One important component of any flea control program is washing the pet's bedding. Washing of pets and bedding with an insecticidal preparation will aid in control. Newer products with insect growth regulators are readily available in pet stores.

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