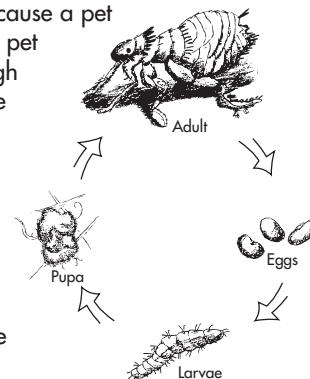


Keeping Your Home Free of Fleas

Fleas are one of the most common causes of pruritic or itchy skin disease in pets. There are two ways fleas can cause a pet to itch. The presence of the fleas crawling around in the fur causes the pet to scratch and bite the skin. Once the pet starts itching, the self trauma to the skin causes the pet to itch more. If the physical presence of fleas is not enough to make the pet itch, some pets are also allergic to the saliva of the flea. Many pets are extremely sensitive to the saliva from the flea bite although the pet may have little evidence of flea infestation. These animals may develop a condition known as flea allergy dermatitis (FAD). FAD is a very pruritic disease and predisposes the pet to secondary bacterial or yeast infections of the skin. Because the pet is so pruritic they groom themselves excessively, eliminating any evidence of fleas. A couple of flea bites every two weeks are sufficient to make a sensitive pet very pruritic without any physical evidence of fleas. FAD should be considered a progressive disease, with each "flea season" resulting in an increasingly severe reaction in the allergic pet. A well-planned flea control strategy is essential to maintaining the health and comfort of both the pet and the owner. Pets that have FAD may never reach a level of zero itchiness, so flea control should be directed at trying to keep fleas off of the pet (see links below for more information).



Appropriate flea control strategy targets all stages of the flea life cycle: eggs, larvae, pupae and adults. Adult fleas emerge from their cocoon and attach to the first host that appears. A pet's thick hair coat and warm body temperature make the dog or cat an ideal host for the adult flea. The adult fleas lay their eggs on the pet, and the eggs fall off the pet into the carpet, bedding or wherever the pet lies down. The flea eggs hatch into larvae which are very sensitive to light and heat and consequently seek out hiding places, such as cracks in the floor, between carpet fibers, under furniture and under organic material in the kennel. Larvae become pupae and will remain in that state for up to six months until they hatch into adult fleas. Because the flea spends most of its life cycle off of the pet, environmental control should be aggressive.

Environmental controls include frequent: vacuuming and mopping all floors, washing kennel floors, washing the pet's bedding, commercial extermination and outdoor spraying every 2-3 weeks. All pets should be removed from premises during environmental treatments.

Fleas tend to seek dark, cool places. Moderate temperatures with relatively high humidity (70% or higher) make fleas mature faster, while less ideal conditions tend to slow the growth progress.

Although adult fleas are discriminating about their hosts, all of the pets and humans in an infested home are vulnerable. To be successful, a flea control program must involve the entire household, and ALL animals in contact with the affected pet should be treated.

There are many choices for flea control. Insecticides are the most common form of treatment for adult flea infestations and are necessary to eradicate fleas from the animal. Other methods such as insect growth regulators work to eliminate fleas in the egg and larval stages and may be useful in addition to environmental treatment. Your veterinarian can advise you on which combination of products will work best for you.

Goals when treating for flea infestation are to eliminate fleas from the pet, the environment and prevent infestation or re-infestation of the environment and pet:

- Keep grass short and remove any organic debris from the yard and keep kennel areas clean.
- Block off access to crawl spaces under the house or porch and treat these areas with insecticides. Also remember to treat any shaded areas in which your pet may lie.

Note: Fleas may be responsible for the transmission of several diseases hazardous to humans and pets.

More information on fleas can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/index.html>

http://www.vetmed.iastate.edu/animal_owners/animal_health/dermatology/index.html

<http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/entml2/samplers/mf760.asp>

For questions or further assistance, please call
Heska's Medical and Technical Support Services at **1-800-GO HESKA, option 5.**

