

# Flea Prevention and Facts

Flea Infestations are the most common parasite problem of dogs and cats in our area. It is estimated that American pet owners spend **over 500 million dollars** each year on flea products most of which do not work! During the past few years much research has centered on studying the life cycle of the species of fleas that attack dogs and cats in an effort to develop better flea control methods. There are over 2000 species of fleas, but only a few actually attack dogs and cats.

## Here are some facts you should know:

- **Flea eggs are white and about the size of a grain of sand.** The eggs are laid while the flea is on the pet and easily roll off the fur into the environment. Eggs usually hatch in 1-10 days, depending on the temperature and humidity. Once the eggs hatch, the larvae move deeper into the carpet to get away from light and searching for food. Temperatures below 65° and relative humidity below 70% slow down growth of the flea. When the larva is mature, it produces a silk-like cocoon. Because the cocoon is sticky, it quickly becomes coated with debris from the environment that helps camouflage it.
- **The cocoon stage can last 9-174 days.** Adult fleas emerge from the cocoon when **stimulated by heat, vibrations, and exhaled carbon dioxide.** The entire life cycle can be completed in as little as 12-14 days, or as long as 140 days. Under average conditions, the entire life cycle takes 3-4 weeks.
- **Adult fleas are attracted to house pets by the warmth of their body, movement, and changes in light intensity and exhaled carbon dioxide.** Fleas have tremendously powerful back legs which they use for jumping onto your pet. It is estimated that if we had as much power in our legs as the flea; we could jump over the Empire State Building. It is reported that fleas can jump as high as 13 feet.
- It is now known that the adult flea species that attacks dogs and cats spends its **ENTIRE** adult life on your pet. Once the adult flea begins to feed on your pet, it **must have almost constant access to the blood for it to survive.** Adult fleas cannot live off an animal more than 3-4 days without a blood meal.
- **Egg production begins within 48 hours of the first blood meal, reaches a peak of 40-50 eggs per day and can last well over 100 days.** Female fleas can produce over **2000 EGGS** during their life. This is equivalent to producing their body weight in eggs every day of their life. While only a fraction of these eggs will eventually develop to adults in the natural environment, this high rate of reproduction ensures that there will **ALWAYS** be fleas!
- **New adult fleas must have a blood meal within 2-3 weeks after hatching.** The higher the temperature and lower the humidity, the quicker the fleas will die.
- It is common for people to be attacked by fleas **after returning from vacation or being away from home for several days.** This is often due to the increased temperature that occurs when the air conditioning is turned back providing a better optimum temperature and humidity (in our area) for fleas to mature.
- Fleas consume **15 times their body weight** with every blood meal. An infestation of 220 female fleas **could consume 10% of a 1-pound kitten's blood volume in one day.** The majority of blood consumed is passed out as partially digested feces ("**Flea Dirt**") that serve as essential food for flea larvae in the carpets and other areas.