



Fleas



Description

Adult fleas are 2mm long, wingless and vary in colour from greyish to dark brown. They are well adapted to their way of life - their 'armour' makes it almost impossible to squash them, and their narrow body allows them to move around very quickly among hairs or feathers. Their back legs are highly developed enabling them to jump considerable heights. The three most common types of flea in the U.K. are the cat flea (the most common in Britain), the dog flea, and the human flea (vary rare).

Where and how do they live?

Fleas live exclusively on blood from warm-blooded animals, and although they have a preferred host, e.g. cat fleas prefer cats and dog fleas prefer dogs, they can be found on and feed from other animals and people. As well as being present on the host, fleas are often found on the host's bedding. Problems can occur when cats or dogs are removed from a house, as the fleas left behind have no choice but to move to people. Whilst cat and dog fleas cannot breed without their preferred hosts, they can live for several months on a diet of human blood.

Why are they a problem?

Fleas are known to carry disease and can also be responsible for the transmission of parasitic worms such as dog tapeworm. In the U.K, however, fleas are not generally responsible for the spread of infection but can and do inflict unpleasant bites on their host. Fleabites will be seen as a tiny dark red spot surrounded by a reddened area. The bite will irritate for a few days. In some cases people become extra sensitive to them.

How do they breed?

Fleas pass through three stages before emerging as adults. Flea eggs are too small to be seen with the naked eye. They are laid in a variety of locations which include the fur of the host or in its bedding. The eggs hatch in about one week into small legless larvae, which feed on a mixture of dead insects, skin particles and the droppings of the adult flea. Flea larvae like to live in dark humid places such as carpets and animal bedding. The larvae then pupate, and after about three weeks, adult fleas hatch in response to vibrations made by a passing host. The complete life cycle will normally take four weeks but could take longer at low temperatures.



What you can do to prevent fleas in your home?

To prevent the introduction of fleas into your home you are advised to provide your pets with flea collars or add an anti-flea supplement to their food. There are a few of these products available, which can be purchased from your vet. They will also be able to advise you on the one most suitable for your pet. Regular vacuuming and cleaning of carpets is also a good way to stop fleas breeding in your home.

What you can do to get rid of fleas?

If possible try to identify the source of the problem. In many cases this can be traced to a family pet. If you suspect the source is a pet you should consult your veterinary surgeon that may confirm your suspicions. Treatment for pets may involve the use of an insecticide aerosol spray or powder, or a product to add to your pet's food. Your vet will explain where and how to use the product and this may include treatment of the animal's bedding. Thorough cleaning of floors and floor coverings with a vacuum cleaner is also recommended. Empty the vacuum cleaner after use and spray inside the cleaner or any new bag used with a fly or crawling insect spray to kill any fleas collected. If you feel that the infestation is small and can be localised it is possible to treat infected rooms yourself with a specialist product (available from your vet), or any general purpose crawling insect spray available from hardware stores or local chemists. It is important that you follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.

How we can help?

Waltham Forest provides a service to eradicate Flea infestations. You can help us by clearing light furniture away from the edges of rooms to be treated and by vacuuming the carpets before we visit. A single spray treatment of carpets, soft furnishings and rooms with bare floorboards will be made and all treated areas should remain undisturbed for four to seven days. You should be aware there is a charge for this service.

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