

## Dealing With Fleas

Many dog lovers are not aware that flea infection occurs more commonly in the fall. Although New York City does not have a high incidence of fleas, this provides no comfort to the dog and family who become afflicted with this annoying parasite. Fleas are wingless insects which jump and they will attack any source of blood (including humans) if the preferred dog or cat host is not available. Once fleas take hold, they can survive for extended periods **off the host**. Eradication involves flea baths and dips, professional extermination and/or flea bombs, follow-up house sprays, topical and systemic insecticides, and medication for those pets allergic to the flea saliva.

The best way to avoid flea infestation is to use effective preventative measures. The older flea products, such as organophosphates and pyrethrins, were less popular due to toxic side effects, difficulty of application, and gradual flea resistance. Flea control has become much safer and more successful than it used to be due to the development of revolutionary ectoparasiticides. These products include fipronil (Frontline), imidacloprid (Advantage), lufenuron (Program), methoprene (Frontline Plus), pyriproxyfen (Knockout, Biospot), and selamectin (Revolution).

However, it is important to remember that most flea life stages (eggs, larvae, pupae) occur **off the host** and are inaccessible to on-animal agents. These stages can lay dormant in the ground for long periods of time. The survival rate of newly emerged fleas depends greatly on temperature and humidity. Also, the adults of the most prevalent flea species (*C. felis*) can feed on a wide of avian and mammalian hosts making outdoor flea infestations quite common. All of these factors allow fleas to constantly reinfest our urban environments and find a way into our homes.

Research points to the conclusion that true flea product failures are rare. Most problems in flea control stem from poor owner compliance, application errors, and lack of understanding of how the flea cycle impacts control strategies. In other words, thorough flea control is all about preventing flea reproduction. We recommend that you ask your vet to teach you about the flea process and how to develop an effective flea prevention program. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this topic further, please do not hesitate to call on me.

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