

FLEAS

External Parasite

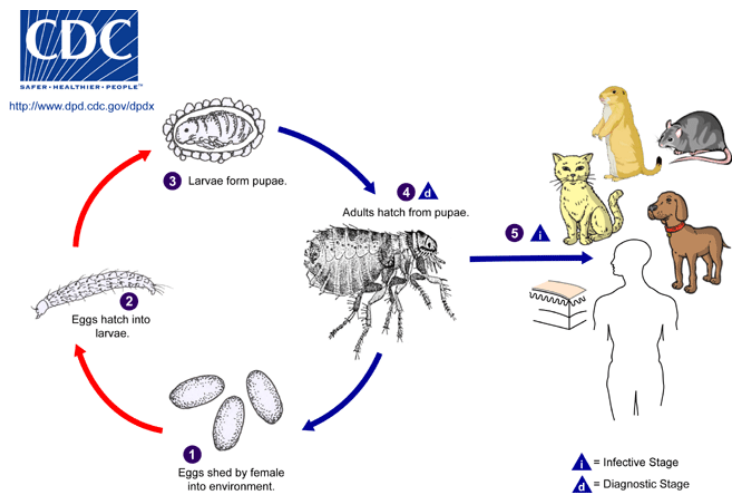


At some point in their lives, many pets experience discomfort caused by external parasites such as fleas, ticks, or mites on their skin or in their ears. These parasites can be extremely irritating to pets and can cause serious skin problems or even carry disease.

Flea Basics

Fleas thrive in the environment when the weather is warm and humid. It is possible for your pet to pick up fleas wherever an infestation exists, often in areas frequented by other animals. Adult fleas are dark brown and no bigger than a sesame seed. They spend virtually all of their time on your pet and have the ability to move rapidly over your pet's skin.

The flea life cycle can be anywhere from 12 days to 6 months in length depending on environmental factors such as temperature and humidity. Female fleas begin laying eggs within 24 hours of selecting a host and produce up to 50 eggs per day. These eggs can fall from your pet onto the floor or furniture in any indoor or outdoor area that your pet has access. The eggs will hatch and become tiny, worm-like larvae that burrow into carpets, under furniture, or into soil before spinning a cocoon. The cocooned flea pupae can lie dormant (inactive) for weeks to months before emerging as adults that are ready to infest.



Diagnosis, Risks and Consequences

You may not know that your pet has fleas until their numbers increase to the point that your pet is showing signs of discomfort. This may include mild redness to severe scratching that could lead to open sores and skin infections like “hot spots”. One of the first signs you may notice if your pet has fleas is “flea dirt” - black flea droppings left on your pet's coat. You may not actually be able to see the fleas themselves but they can still be on your pet or in the environment.

Fleas survive by sucking the blood of their hosts; young or small pets with heavy flea infestations may become anemic. Some pets can develop an allergy to flea saliva that may result in more severe irritation and scratching; these signs may develop after just one or two flea bites. It is also possible for you and your pets to become infected with certain types of tapeworms if fleas are ingested that are carrying tapeworm eggs. Pets often ingest fleas when using their teeth to scratch at flea bite sites.

Treatment and Control

The veterinarians at PAWS Atlanta Veterinary Clinic can help recommend an appropriate flea control plan for your pet based on your needs, your pet's needs and the severity of the flea infestation.

Pets at risk for fleas should be treated during the flea season with an appropriate preventative.

When an infestation has occurred, it is important to remember that much of the flea's life cycle is spent off of your pet, so treating only your pet will not eliminate the problem. If you kill the adult fleas and do not kill the eggs, larvae and pupae, your pet will become reinvested when the immature fleas become adults. Therefore, in addition to treating your pet, it is also important to thoroughly clean your pet's sleeping quarters and vacuum the floors and furniture that your pet comes in contact with frequently. If you plan to use insecticides to kill fleas in your pet's environment, consult the veterinarians at PAWS Atlanta Veterinary Clinic about products that are safe for use around pets.

Did you know?

- Flea larvae will not develop outdoors in areas exposed to sunlight. Common sites of outdoor larval development are cool, shady areas where pets rest.
- Flea larvae commonly develop in undisturbed, protected sites indoors (e.g. in carpets, under furniture, along baseboards).
- Flea pupae can remain dormant in the cocoon for up to 30 weeks
- Mechanical pressure, CO₂, and increased temperature stimulate flea emergence.
- Under normal conditions, most adult fleas generally survive 2-3 months.