



Shantock Hall Lane, Bovingdon, HP3 0NQ

Tel: 01442 833198

info@hopevets.com

www.hopevets.com

Fleas

Where do they come from?

The first thing to say is that fleas are far more common than we care to admit. Your pet can catch fleas from being in close contact with other animals (particularly cats) and they can also be caught from just being in the same place that an animal with fleas has been previously. Worryingly though the most common source of fleas on our pets is actually our carpets at home.

Why are fleas important?

Fleas aren't just unpleasant little parasites. They can actually cause considerable disease in some pets. This is because their saliva is extremely allergenic, so a single bite to a flea allergic animal can trigger a nasty skin disease. When fleas bite they suck blood. A normal animal doesn't even notice but a puppy or kitten with a severe infestation can become very ill and anaemic.

Why are there fleas in my carpet?

Unfortunately for us fleas breed at a fast and furious rate. Each female can lay as many as 200 eggs on your pet. These then fall off, usually where your pets spend most of their time. I don't know about your pets, but in my house this would mean flea eggs on the carpet, sofa and dog beds – lovely!

These eggs hatch after about 4-12 days and out come the larvae which are shy creatures and like to burrow down away from the light. So larvae are usually found deep in the carpet pile and can crawl as far as 20 feet from where they hatched. After 7-18 days the larvae pupate and spin a cocoon around themselves for a bit of privacy whilst they develop into adults. The pupae are very tough and can survive for up to 9 months if they don't detect a restaurant (your pet) in close proximity. They are also resistant to household flea sprays.

The pupae hatch in response to vibration or the air exhaled by your pet. When the adults emerge they jump on your poor pet and begin feeding – all in as little as 7 seconds.

Treating fleas: An ongoing battle?

Here comes the good news... Treating fleas couldn't be easier. The easiest ones to use are 'spot ons' which is a small amount of liquid which gets applied to the skin on the back of your pet's neck. The better products even kill the larval stages as well as the adult fleas.

There is a but... As you can see from the massive numbers of fleas that can hatch from just the one pioneer your pet brings home, and the way the clever critters hide deep in the carpet, once you've got one flea the problem can escalate very quickly. By treating your pet for fleas every month, you can ensure that any adult flea feeding on your pet dies very quickly and hopefully has no time to lay eggs. Then you can feel safe in the knowledge that your carpets, beds and sofas have no unwelcome guests. Without effective monthly treatment you can be unlucky and have to deal with an infested house. At this stage you don't just need to deal with the fleas biting you and your pets but also deal with the eggs and larvae in your carpets. We supply a very effective household spray, which kills eggs and larvae in your carpet which should, in combination with treating your pet, get the infestation under control. The household sprays can be toxic to fish though, so move any fish tanks before you spray.

Beware, not all flea treatments are the same. Some of the products, particularly those sold without restriction in pet shops and supermarkets, are not very effective and often only kill fleas on a very small area of your pet and only for a very short time. We supply a very effective 'spot on' flea treatment for cats and dogs which is easy to apply, starts killing fleas within an hour and which continues to kill fleas anywhere on your pet for a whole month, giving you peace of mind.

Does my pet have fleas?

Heavy infestations can be very easy to spot. You'll probably notice your pet scratching and chewing a lot. If you part the fur or run a fine comb through the coat you'll often capture live crawling fleas (yuck!). The other sign to look for is flea dirt (the polite name for flea faeces). This accumulates in your pet's coat and is flecks of gritty dark brown/black material. If you shake some of the flea dirt onto a wet piece of white paper it will turn red. After all it is digested blood!



What about cats?

Cats are a bit sneaky and will often share their fleas around the household. They then spend large portions of the day grooming out all the incriminating flea dirt evidence in order that the dogs get the blame. Should you find fleas on your pets always treat all the dogs and cats in the household – if one's got it, they all do!

The other thing to note about cats is that they are very sensitive to a dog flea treatment called permethrin. Although very safe in dogs, if applied to cats, permethrin is highly toxic. So please be careful and read the labels on your flea products carefully and never, ever apply flea products meant for dogs to your cats. If in doubt, please ask us.

Did you know?

- In our own homes, the theoretical number of flea eggs left around your house after three days of an infestation of 500 fleas is 20,000.
- The largest ever recorded infestation of human fleas in the UK was found at a pig farm in 1986. It reportedly turned an area the size of a tennis court brown. We estimate that to cover an area of that size, this particular flea family must have numbered around 133,378,450!
- The male flea sports a penis approximately 2.5 times the length of its own body — the largest, relative to its size, of any insect.
- Another useful part of the male's sexual equipment are two antennae bearing sink-plunger-like suckers. It was believed that these were used to subdue the female. Top thinkers amongst the flea intelligencia now believe that the male needs these suckers just to hang on during the act. If you doubt the necessity for this, bear in mind that when a flea jumps, it does so with acceleration roughly equal to that of the Apollo space rocket.