

# Fleas: Myths, Facts, and Points of Interest

By Dr. Terry C. Gerros, D.V.M., D.A.C.V.I.M.

Contrary to some, fleas are a common problem in our area. Besides causing medical problems in our pets, i.e. allergies, fleas are a source of one of the internal parasites (tapeworms) in dogs and cats.



Flea denial is a real problem if you don't see a flea on your animal, you don't have fleas. Not so much. We tend to focus on the adult and don't consider the flea eggs, larvae and pupae stages. Treating our pets for fleas requires constant year round application of the flea medicine. Once we stop treating for fleas, we invite the fleas back into our homes and on to our pets. In this article I have summarized some of the key facts about flea biology along with myths and other points of interest.

## Flea Biology:

- Female fleas begin feeding on pets within minutes and lay 40-50 eggs per day.
- Larvae take 5-12 days to develop into pupae.
- Fleas emerge from pupae anywhere from 14-180 days.
- Temperature and humidity drive flea population growth.
  - Optimal relative humidity is 70-85%.
  - Optimal temperature is 70-85 degrees F.

## Common Misconceptions:

- Because there are multiple veterinary flea products, fleas are becoming resistant to the older products.
- Switching products is effective because it exposes fleas to new chemicals.
- You should not see ANY fleas on your pet if they are treated with a veterinary flea product.
- Indoor cats can not get fleas.
- Spraying the yard with insecticides and using flea foggers in the home will control fleas in the environment.
- In many parts of the country, autumn, not summer, is when flea populations are highest.
- I don't have carpets in my house, therefore I can't have fleas (they live in the cracks).

As scary as it sounds, our pets (dogs and cats) are permanent hosts for fleas and are necessary for flea propagation. Urban wildlife (opossums and raccoons) are also an important source of fleas and they (including our dogs and cats) are a source of flea egg contamination in places like our yards and public parks. Dogs can pick up fleas from dog parks and other common areas, even when there are no other dogs around.

Those fleas may have come from eggs laid on other animals 6-8 weeks ago (see Flea biology above). Shady, protected outdoors areas are ideal spots for flea development. Although you treat your entire yard, except where your dog sleeps, the area you don't treat may be the hot bed and source of reinfestation.

#### **What can I do to minimize the problems associated with fleas?**

- Be sure to treat ALL of your pets.
- Be vigilant in treating your pets and the environment in which they live, year round.
- Don't wait to treat your pet until it is completely miserable from flea infestation.
- It can take several weeks for all development stages of fleas to be exhausted, again be vigilant.

#### **What is the best product to use on my pet?**

There are so many products available and all have their good points. As for me, I hate reinventing the wheel, that is why I use Tide to wash my clothes. (Tide is what my mother uses, if it good enough for her, it is good enough for me.) I would suggest you discuss this with your veterinarian and be vigilant. As for me, I am a Frontline Plus and Siphotrol guy. Don't ask me to change.

*Dr. Gerros owns and operates Santiam Equine Cordon Road Veterinary Clinic in Salem.*