

Ask the Vet: How do I control fleas on my pet?

By Travis A. Hawkins, DVM
Akron Veterinary Clinic

Fleas can be an annoying problem to deal with in your home, and can also be detrimental to your pet's health. Fleas are small insects that require the blood of a dog or cat in order to reproduce and lay eggs. Once a flea takes a blood meal from your pet, she can lay an enormous quantity of eggs, which are then shed into the environment. If this environment is your home, a few fleas can quickly produce millions of offspring and infest your carpets, furniture, and bedding. If you ask anyone who has dealt with a flea problem, it is certainly much easier to prevent an infestation than to treat it.

We typically recommend Frontline Plus for your pet. Though it is more expensive than most store brands, it is much safer and more effective than many other products. We have seen many adverse reactions to some over the counter spot on products that can be very severe. Also, many times these products simply don't work, and fleas continue to be a problem after application. Frontline will control fleas on dogs for up to three months (1 month control for ticks) and on cats for one month. However, if fleas have already laid eggs in the environment, more drastic measures are needed to clean them up. Room foggers and premise sprays, along with frequent vacuuming and laundering may be necessary. Many times your yard can be home to many fleas, especially if stray cats or other infested animals move through that area. Complete cleanup can take up to several months, depending on the severity of the infestation.

The most frequent health issue we see with fleas is called flea allergy dermatitis. Some pets can be very sensitive to fleas, and even part of a flea egg that is hardly visible can set off a skin allergy that is unbearable for the animal, as well as the people who are kept up at night listening to their pet lick and chew. In these cases, we can administer medications to lessen the symptoms, but ultimately, the flea problem needs to be resolved. Though less frequent, fleas can also cause anemia (low blood cells that carry oxygen to the tissues), tapeworms, and even the plague. Fleas can also jump on people and cause an itchy rash that is not pleasant.

Flea prevention is definitely an excellent idea, and your pet would agree. If you have any questions about flea prevention or cleaning up an infestation, call us or stop by the clinic and we would be happy to help you out.