



# Oak Bay Animal Hospital

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## FLEA CONTROL ON DOGS AND CATS

### **General Information:**

Fleas infest both dogs and cats, and can be passed back and forth between your pets. Besides causing severe itching, fleas can transmit parasites such as tapeworms.

If one dog or cat in the household has fleas, assume that ALL dogs and cats in the household have fleas. Therefore, ALL animals in the house and yard must be treated to control the infestation.

Adult fleas live on your pet, feeding on blood and laying eggs. They account for 1% of the total flea population. The other 99% live in the house, yard and under decks or porches in the form of EGGS, LARVAE, and PUPAE.

In just 4 weeks, a single pair of adult fleas can produce an infestation of more than 6,000 eggs, larvae, and new adults. It can take up to 4 months to kill all these stages of fleas.

### **Flea Allergy:**

When a flea bites your pet, it injects a small amount of saliva into the skin. Many animals are allergic to this saliva. In highly allergic animals, the bite can cause severe itching that lasts for a month after one bite.

Biting and scratching around the rump and groin area is the most common sign of flea allergy. "Hot spots" (bare, painful oozing patches of skin) often result. Successful treatment of flea allergy requires the absolute elimination of fleas from contact with the affected dog or cat.

## FLEA CONTROL PRODUCTS

There are many flea control products on the market. The best products to use will depend on the type and number of pets you have, whether they are indoors or outdoors, whether or not your neighbors provide good flea control, whether or not friends and family visit with their pets and the severity of the problem. The MOST important thing to remember to successfully eliminate fleas is to treat ALL of your pets EVERY month.

### **1. FLEA CONTROL ON YOUR PET**

**Revolution** This is a liquid applied to the skin on the back of your pet's neck. It kills over 98% of the adult fleas on the pet within 4 hours and lasts for one month. It can be safely used on puppies as young as 6 weeks old and kittens as young as 8 weeks old. This is one of the most effective and safest flea control products we have found. We do not recommend the "spot on" products found in pet stores as they are not as effective. Revolution also prevents heartworm disease in dogs and cats, reduces the number of intestinal worms, and kills ear mites.

**Trifexis** This is a flavored chewable tablet that kills the female flea before she is able to lay eggs and prevents infestations. It can be safely used on puppies as young as 8 weeks old. This product begins killing fleas within 30 minutes and is effective for one month. Trifexis contains a second medication which prevents heartworm disease and lowers the number of intestinal worms.

**Comfortis** This is a flavored chewable tablet which can be given to dogs and cats. It begins killing fleas within 30 minutes and is effective for one month. Comfortis is designed as a single purpose medication for flea control.

**Flea Sprays, Powders and Collars** These are much less effective since many fleas have developed resistance to the insecticides used in these products. Sprays and powders must be reapplied weekly. Cats may drool excessively if they groom themselves after being sprayed.

**Flea Shampoo** This may kill adult fleas on your pet at the time of bathing, but has no residual effect. Your pet will again have fleas within hours of getting a bath if your house or yard are infested.

**Flea comb** Useful in removing fleas from young puppies or kittens without using an insecticide. This is also a good way to monitor the success of your flea control. These fine-toothed combs collect fleas and flea droppings when combed through your pet's hair coat.

**Saltwater** Despite popular belief, saltwater swimming has no protective effect against fleas. Flea burrow in the air pocket under each hair, and remain viable even after hours of submersion.

## **2. FLEA CONTROL IN YOUR HOUSE**

Flea control in the house is aimed at destroying or removing flea eggs and larvae. Treat all areas of the house including those to which your pet does not have access. Flea larvae can crawl six feet an hour, underneath doors, furniture, cushions, etc. They feed on flea dirt (digested blood). Eggs can survive for years in cooler damp areas of your home. If you can, warm and dehumidify these areas, then vacuum thoroughly. Flea eggs hatch in response to warmth. Eggs are almost impossible to kill, so removing them and killing larvae are key.

Vacuuming can be an excellent way to control fleas when few are present. Larvae and adults are stimulated to move up from the depths of carpeting or out of crevices by the vibrations of the vacuum cleaner. Vacuum everywhere, including under cushions, under furniture, on tile hardwood and linoleum floors. Remove the bag, wrap tightly in a plastic bag, and get it off your property.

Household sprays and bombs are very effective. With bombs, you must use a separate one for each room. With sprays you can better reach the hard-to-get corners and crevices. Retreat in 2 weeks or as directed on the label. Do not use these products if you keep birds in your house. Cover aquariums.

Powdered borax can be used as a less toxic, relatively inexpensive house treatment. Sprinkle it on the carpet and sweep it in with a broom and then vacuum it up, or mix it with warm water and sponge mop it on tile and wood flooring.

You might also consider a professional exterminator.

## **3. FLEA CONTROL IN YOUR YARD**

Yard sprays containing diazinon are effective for flea control, although they will also kill other beneficial insects.