



Treating a Flea Outbreak

Fleas are an ever-present problem in our area, and must be fought year-round. Successful flea control and treatment involves keeping your pets up to date on quality preventatives, and treatment of the environment.

Flea Life Cycle

The flea life cycle has 4 stages – Egg, Larvae, Pupae, & Adult. The adult fleas are the only ones that live on a host; all other stages stay in the environment until adulthood.

When an adult flea lays eggs, they immediately fall off of the host to the environment. They stay here for up to 10 days until they hatch. Ideal hatching environment is 75-85 degrees with 50-90% humidity. After hatching, the flea enters the larval stage, during which they burrow down into the environment to escape the light. In a home, this means burrowing deep into the carpets/couch cushions, under furniture, or along baseboards. They stay in the larval stage for up to 12 days, after which they spin a cocoon to begin the pupal stage. Under ideal circumstances they will hatch as adult fleas after 1-4 weeks, however they can stay dormant for up to 9 months before emerging. Things such as vibration, pressure, and heat stimulate the pupae to hatch. Once the adult flea emerges, they must find a host within 4 days. Once they find a host, they begin feeding within the first 10 seconds, and can begin laying eggs within just two days. One adult female flea can lay 40-50 eggs in a single day, and can live up to 100 days.

Dangers of Fleas

Fleas are not only a nuisance – they can cause serious health risks to you and your pets! One adult flea can eat up to 15 times its' body weight in blood every day. For young/old/immune-compromised animals, this can very quickly lead to severe anemia which can be life-threatening. For healthy animals, prolonged exposure can also lead to severe anemia.

Some cats and dogs develop allergic reactions to flea bites ("flea allergy dermatitis"), and can develop severe skin infections as a result from over-itching at flea bites.

Additionally, the species of flea most commonly seen on cats and dogs acts as the host for tapeworms, which are easily transferrable to both animals and humans.



Treating the Outbreak

Treating a flea outbreak requires treating both the environment and your pets. Treating your pets should be done under the guidance of your veterinarian; many over the counter treatments are of low quality and are not highly effective. Products used in the shelter include Revolution, Nexgard, and Frontline Plus; all of which can be purchased through your vet. ***It is vitally important to use species appropriate medications, as some dog medications can be lethal to cats.*** Keeping all the pets in your home up to date on their preventatives will be sure to kill all adult fleas, however these medications do not do anything to kill the eggs, larvae, or pupae life stages. These life stages must be approached with cleaners that specifically target the environment, such as sprays and bombs.

Some products target adult-only fleas, while other contain **insect growth regulators (IGR)** which act to prevent the larval stages from maturing. These IGR products will be the most effective in treating the environment, however, the pupal life stage of fleas is not effected by such products, and must hatch before they will be killed. To do this, it is a good idea to vacuum the area pre-treatment, as the vibrations from the vacuum will help stimulate the pupae to hatch. After vacuuming, discard the bag outside of the home or empty the canister outside and away from the home.

Several different products should be used in treating an environment, as they all effect the environment in different ways. Foggers are great for covering a large area, but they do not get down in the cracks by baseboards, nor do they penetrate cushions. To treat these places, the furniture should be pulled out, vacuumed under, and sprayed. If appropriate, cushions should have their covers removed and washed in hot water with bleach. The cushion itself should then be vacuumed & sprayed. Additionally, all bedding (both human & pet) should be washed in hot water with bleach.

It's also important to consider that you can have a flea infestation outdoors. Fleas can hitch a ride into your yard on wildlife- overgrown, shady areas, sheds (especially if rarely used) and other hiding spots may make your yard more attractive to wildlife that could be carrying fleas. If your foster dog is going outdoors or any other pets are going in and out, you may want to consider treating your yard with an IGR product.

Be sure to read all the instructions on any products you use indoors or out, as often you and your pets need to vacate the area during and for a time after treatment!

After Treating

If treating between having foster animals, once the area has been sufficiently treated, and a week has gone by with no signs of fleas on other pets in the home, please alert the Foster Manager, and they will get you set up with another foster animal!

If treating while a foster animal is still in the home, let us know if your foster needs to stay at AHS for a day so you can treat the environment.