

FLEAS

What do fleas look like?

Adults fleas are normally 1 - 4mm long, brownish in colour, without wings, but with powerful legs adapted for jumping. Female fleas can live up to two years, during which time they can lay up to 1000 eggs.

Where do they live?

Adult fleas live exclusively as parasites of warm-blooded animals. The females lay their eggs after feeding on the infested animal. The eggs drop onto the floor and the animal's bedding. After several days the eggs will develop into larvae. After two to three weeks the larvae will be fully developed. The larva will then spin a cocoon where it will spend a further two to three weeks before emerging as an adult flea.

The Council provides information leaflets on the following range of pests:

Ants
Bedbugs
Cockroaches
Fleas
Flies
Mice
Pigeons
Rats
Slugs
Spiders
Wasps

Pest Control Advice

FLEAS

What do they eat?

Larvae feed on debris and adult flea droppings. Adult fleas feed solely on vertebrate blood.

What are the signs of infestation?

- You will probably first become alerted to the fact that your pet may have fleas by its constant scratching. Your suspicion can then be confirmed either by seeing fleas or flea droppings in the coat. Flea droppings are small black specks mainly composed of dried blood, and they are usually seen in clusters lying next to the skin. They are easy to spot in light coloured animals by brushing back the hair. In dark coated breeds it may be better to comb the animal over a sheet of paper onto which any flea droppings will then fall. The identity of the black specks may be confirmed by adding a few drops of water - if they turn red, your pet has fleas.
- Bites on you or family members - in humans, flea bites can produce an allergic reaction. The typical symptom of a flea bite is a small red spot 5mm or so in diameter. In sensitive individuals, however, the response can be worse and the bite intensely itchy.

Are fleas a health hazard?

In this part of Europe there is little evidence to suggest that fleas transmit any serious illness to humans. However, flea bites can cause skin irritation and distress. If in doubt, contact your GP for advice.

How did I get fleas?

In most situations a flea problem in the home, is caused by the cat or bird flea. These are the two most common fleas found today, followed by the dog flea. (The human flea is extremely rare). Fleas can be carried into the home by an animal or a person.

How can I prevent flea infestation?

Control

There are many stages involved in treating a flea problem. In order to treat an infestation successfully the type and source of the flea needs to be determined. This may require professional identification.

First, clear as much floor space as possible, to ensure that treatment is as thorough as possible.

Vacuuming all areas helps to remove any debris, eggs, larvae and adult fleas. The vibration of the vacuum cleaner also helps to stimulate adults to hatch from their cocoon stage. Pay particular attention to areas where your pet may sleep.

Remember to remove the waste collection bag, from the vacuum cleaner, and to dispose of it in an outside bin as you may have collected eggs, larvae and adult fleas while vacuuming.

The standard treatment for infested premises is the application of a residual insecticide, either as a powder or a liquid spray. The insecticide is applied to all floor surfaces AND THESE AREAS MUST NOT BE VACUUMED OR WASHED FOR AT LEAST 10 DAYS AFTER THE TREATMENT, OR LONGER IF POSSIBLE.

Although new adult fleas may still be emerging from cocoons up to a month after treatment, there should still be sufficient insecticide present to kill them off.

In order to achieve effective control, pets MUST also be treated with a product approved for veterinary use. NEVER APPLY INSECTICIDES DIRECTLY ONTO PETS. Pets' bedding should be thoroughly washed at a high enough temperature to kill off all stages of the flea's development.

Safety

When purchasing an insecticide it must be suitable for the control of the specific pest to be treated.

When using insecticides you must always follow the manufacturer's safety instructions. Do not use insecticide dusts on beds.

Seek professional advice from the Council's Environmental Health Service if you require any assistance.

Warning: Use biocides safely. Always read the label and product information before use.

