

Those Darn Fleas!

Submitted by Dr Varner-Soden at Day Hollow Animal Hospital

As a pet owner, at some point or another you have most likely encountered pesky flea trouble. If you haven't yet, you almost surely will at some point in the future. We live in an area where fleas thrive, and with fleas come the potential for additional maladies such as Tapeworms, Bartonella, Hemotropic mycoplasmas, and Flea Allergy Dermatitis. Pets can bring them indoors from the outside, as can we on our clothes. Fleas can also enter a house through nooks and crannies such as a screened in porch or a basement. Once you are noticing adult fleas as being a problem, you are only seeing the tip of the iceberg, as there is actually an intricate life cycle at play and most likely flea eggs and larvae are also present. The most common places a pet will itch and bite due to fleas is behind the ears and around the base of the tail. If your cat seems to be excessively grooming lately, check for fleas. Areas of baldness appearing on your pet may be an indication. So how can one effectively prevent fleas in the first place? And if fleas are a current problem, how do you get rid of them? In both scenarios, PERSISTENCE is a key factor.

FLEA PREVENTION:

Some folks prefer natural remedies such as essential oils or yeast; however, these are often ineffective and are actually not always as safe as you might like to think. Nothing beats combing through your pet daily to monitor for fleas, and vacuuming the house and furniture often. "Flea Dirt" on your pet's skin can be mistaken for regular dirt – however, this curly-cue debris (which is actually flea stool) will turn red when placed on a paper towel with some water. To effectively prevent flea trouble, the methods employed need to be long-lasting and need to cover all parts of the flea life cycle, including regulation of growth. Various products may be used, and sometimes in combination. Just because something is found over-the-counter, it does NOT guarantee safety or efficacy! Never use a product meant for dogs on your cat, as you could potentially kill your cat – for example, by using Pyrethrin products on them. You also need to be sure the product is not a diverted product (i.e. supposed to be available only through Veterinarians yet is found on the shelf of a store not requiring a prescription) as they may not be the true product you are intending to use. The product also needs to be followed closely in regards to frequency of application and correct weight range of pet. Topical products may include baths, spot-on treatments for monthly use, or a continual use collar that lasts for several months. There are even some oral products that can be very effective. Ask your veterinarian which products they prefer and offer. If you are unsure whether a product you purchased for your pet is safe, ASK A VET before using it!

FLEA ERADICATION:

ALL animals in a household need to be treated for fleas, and the house itself (indoors and even possibly outdoors) must be treated as well to completely rid these pests. Due to their life cycle, it may take several months of persistent treatment to achieve complete success. Don't give up, and remember that just like most things in life, like automotive care and your own health care, PREVENTATIVE measures are often better in the first place than waiting to deal with the problem when it inevitably arises.