

Fleas and Your Pet in the Hospital

We are sometime asked whether a pet could acquire fleas while hospitalized. This document is intended to help you understand fleas and their control and treatment.

Can my pet acquire fleas while it is in the hospital?

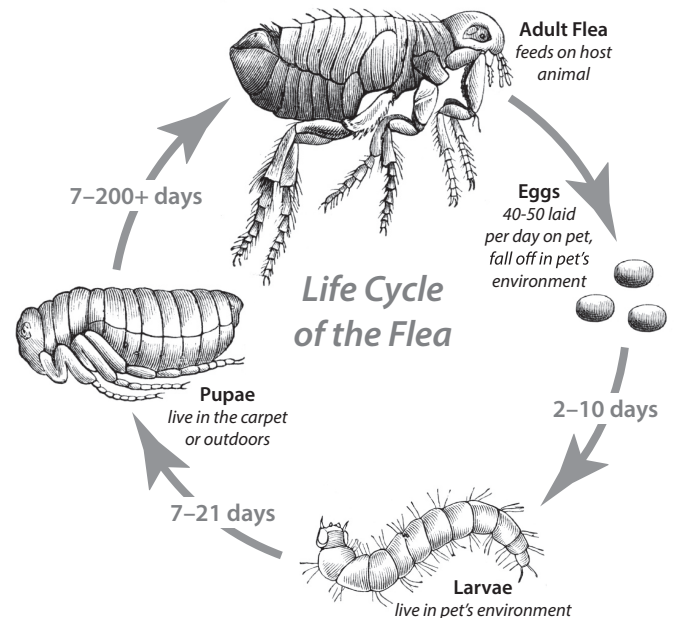
Just as healthy people can catch a cold from their doctor's waiting room if people are sneezing and coughing, pets that visit a veterinary hospital can get fleas from other animals.

Veterinary clinics and hospital are not ideal environments for fleas. They do not have carpets, sofas, beds or furniture that harbor flea eggs that fall off the animal. All areas are frequently cleaned and disinfected and bedding for a hospitalized pet is changed and laundered frequently. However, the veterinary clinic or hospital is a meeting point of many pets. It is therefore not impossible that fleas move from one pet to another in a short contact time in a veterinary hospital or at the groomer.

Several experiments have demonstrated that adult fleas only leave a good host for a new one. They do not leave the mammal host to "explore" the environment. They simply jump to another mammal host. This move from one pet to another can happen very quickly. It is not necessary for a long contact time. A short contact time in the parking lot or waiting room is usually enough, therefore it is very important that all pets are adequately protected against fleas year round. In pets with a good preventative treatment (topical or systemic), the new flea is killed quickly (or even in some cases repelled) and the cycle of parasitism is not initiated. Another reason to control fleas is that tapeworms are transmitted by fleas and these can add another burden to your pet.

How does my pet get fleas if it is indoors only?

Certainly, the risk of having fleas is much higher in outdoor or outdoor-indoor pets than in exclusively indoor pets. However, indoor cats and dogs can also get fleas. Humans and visiting pets can occasionally introduce fleas in the household. The introduction of a new pet can also be the way that fleas use to conquest a new house. Finally, when your pet goes to the groomer or veterinarian (for instance) she/he is exposed to other pets and to fleas. Pets that are not adequately protected (in many cases because the owners do not consider this necessary being an indoor dog/cat) have a higher risk of getting fleas.



Are there organic methods to treat for fleas?

There are several on the market but there are no good data of efficacy. Most of them are plant extracts that are claimed to have repellent effect (rosemary infusion, citrus peel extract, lavender oil, apple cider vinegar). Cat fleas (*Ctenocephalides felis*, the most common flea in dogs and cats) are strongly attracted by an adequate host and these substances do not stop them from jumping into the coat of a warm pet.

Unfortunately at present we do not have proof of efficacy of any of the organic treatments. Vacuuming carpets and floors is effective to reduce the flea population in the household and to prevent re-infestation by eliminating the eggs and larvae. However, this method does not prevent a new infestation of the pet.

The good news is that most of the new products to prevent fleas are extremely safe and environmentally respectful. Some are systemic (i.e. given by mouth and absorbed by the intestines) and therefore the skin surface is not full of product and humans are not in contact with the insecticide. Some others only activate when the flea ingests the product. All FDA approved products have been tested for environmental impact. There is now a broad choice of products for cats and dogs fitting the needs of any pet.

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