

Flea and Tick Prevention

What is flea and tick prevention?

Flea and tick prevention consists of a variety of products that control flea and/or tick infestations on your pet and prevent infestations inside your home. Fleas are small, parasitic insects; they feed on blood from animals and/or people. Ticks are a type of arachnid (like spiders, scorpions, and mites) that are also parasitic.

How can my pet get fleas or ticks?

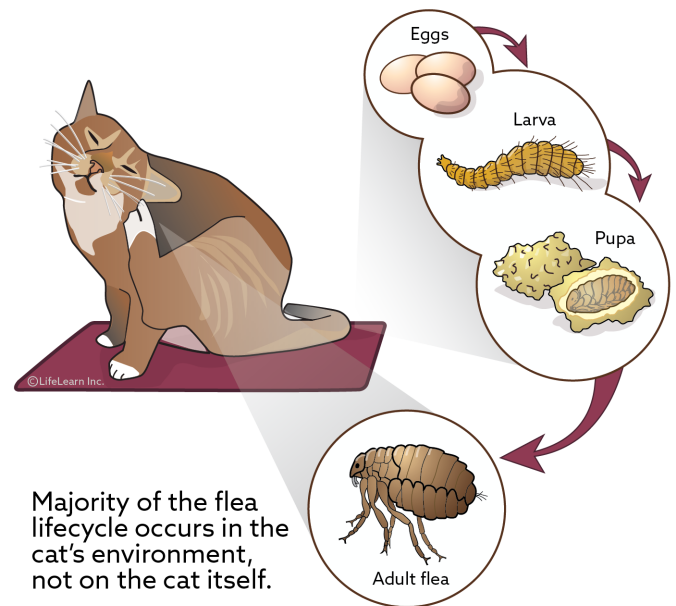
Fleas and ticks can be found worldwide. Fleas can live in many climate zones, but they prefer humid and shady areas, such as under a leaf. They can also be carried by many wild animal hosts, such as foxes, skunks, raccoons, birds, and rodents. They have incredible jumping ability and can easily jump onto you or your pet as you walk by.

Ticks can also live in many climate zones, and prefer humid and shady environments, especially areas with woods, shrubs, weeds, and tall grasses. Ticks can be carried by a variety of wild animal hosts such as deer, horses, and rodents. Ticks cannot jump like fleas but will grab you or your pet as you walk by, through a behavior called questing.

Why is flea and tick prevention important?

Fleas and ticks cause two problems. First, they can cause discomfort and skin irritation through their bites and, in some cases, cause severe allergic reactions in both pets and people. Second, they can carry diseases and cause illness in pets and people. Some of these diseases can be deadly and others can cause severe, chronic, and lifelong illness. Prevention is key to avoiding these problems.

Prevention is also important because fleas and ticks can infest the home. Because they have different life cycles, treating an infestation is much more difficult and costly than preventing an infestation. For more information about life cycles, see handouts "Flea Control in Cats", "Flea Control in Dogs", "Ticks in Dogs", and "Ticks in Cats".



What kinds of illnesses can fleas and ticks cause?

Fleas and ticks can transmit infectious diseases when they take a blood meal from pets or people. The most common flea in North America can transmit murine typhus, flea-borne spotted fever, cat-scratch disease (bartonellosis), and flea tapeworms. Other flea species can transmit salmonellosis, plague, rodent tapeworm, murine trypanosomiasis, and dwarf tapeworm. Fleas in general can transmit hemoplasmosis and tularemia.

Each tick species is known to transmit specific infectious diseases, including: Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis, anaplasmosis, babesiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, rickettsiosis, tularemia, cytauxzoonosis, and hepatozoonosis.

How do I know if my pet needs flea and tick prevention?

Fleas and ticks are small and can sometimes be difficult to identify on your pet. Physical examination is the easiest way to identify signs of fleas or ticks. Using a flea comb can help identify the presence of adult fleas or flea dirt. Flea dirt (flea feces) looks like brownish-black, granular “dirt” that dissolves and turns red when placed on a wet paper towel. Fleas prefer the head and neck area of cats, and the rump and tail area of dogs.

Ticks can vary in size, depending on the life cycle and feeding stage. They can be as small as a pinhead or poppy seed, or as big as a pencil eraser. Ticks can attach anywhere on the body, but prefer dark and hidden areas like the ears, armpits, groin, tail, and between the toes.

Sometimes finding a flea or tick is difficult, especially on cats, because they are constantly grooming. Sometimes the only sign of fleas and ticks is skin irritation, and in these cases, flea and tick prevention is used as a treatment trial.

Fleas and ticks are present year-round in some areas of the world, while others have flea and tick “seasons”. However, many veterinary professionals agree that year-round prevention is recommended when possible, because both fleas and ticks can survive in a variety of climates and can live inside your home and on your warm pet.

What are the different kinds of flea and tick prevention?

There are many products on the market. Some are over-the-counter, and some are prescription. Some are stand-alone products, and some are used in combination with other treatments/medications. Some are applied to the skin, some are worn as a collar, and some are given by mouth (orally). Some are given daily, some are given monthly, and some can last for several months. Depending on your lifestyle, your pet’s lifestyle, and your needs and preferences, your veterinarian will help you choose a product that works best for you and your pet.

Examples of available products include the following:

- Topical flea products: Activyl[®], Advantage[®] II, Cheristin[®]
- Oral flea products: Capstar[®], Comfortis[®], Sentinel[®] (growth regulator only), Credelio[®]
- Topical tick products: Preventic[®] (dogs only)
- Topical combination products: Frontline[®], K9 Advantixx[®] II (dogs only), Bravecto[®], Revolution[®], Seresto[®] (collar), Vectra 3D[®] (dogs only), Effipro[®] Plus, Effitix[®] (dogs only)
- Oral combination products (dogs only): Bravecto[®], NexGard[®], Trifexis[®], Simparica[™]. Credelio[®]

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