FLEAS

Fleas in or around the home are usually linked with a pet dog or cat.

The hopping, brown, flattened from side-to-side, adult flea is easily recognized by many people. But they may not be aware that the same flea that feeds on a dog or cat will also bite people—piercing the skin, sucking blood, and leaving a red, itching "spot."

Female fleas, after feeding on blood, lay eggs which hatch into a small, white, active, worm-like stage which grows to about 1/16 inch long. This stage may be found by homeowners in the "bedding" of flea-infested pets. These larvae appear to live on debris, organic matter, including dried blood. They cannot pierce the skin of people or pets.

When fully grown, this wormlike stage changes into a less active pupal phase in a silken cocoon in which small pieces of background material are encrusted. These cocoons are sensitive to mechanical disturbances, and it has been noted that persons entering a long-deserted house sometimes complain of hordes of fleas suddenly appearing "from nowhere." It is probable, in such cases, that fleas resting in the cocoon, in floor cracks and crevices, come out in response to people moving near them.

Diagrammatic view from right-hand side of adult dog flea—actual size about 1/16 inch long.

Control

Flea control is best accomplished when certain necessary steps are taken. If only one or a few of these steps are taken, then do not depend on adequate flea control. The following courses of action are essential to maintain a good flea control program:

- Sanitation. Vacuuming is an extremely important part of a flea control program. Thoroughly vacuum all areas of the house, including rugs, upholstered furniture, and cracks and crevices where possible. It should be done more frequently than the average homeowner does it. Vacuum about every
third day for a couple of weeks. Be sure to dispose of the vacuum cleaner bag after vacuuming as fleas can escape and reinfest the home.

- **Pets.** Shampoo pets with a flea-killing soap or treat them with a registered pesticide for flea control. Thoroughness in treating the pet is essential. In fact it is recommended that the first treatment be made by a veterinarian. If the pets have bedding, this should be thoroughly washed or dry cleaned. Flea collars are useful as a preventative; however, in some areas because of the climate, certain of these may cause discomfort to the animals, so check with your veterinarian to see what collars are recommended in your area.

- **Pesticide Application Outdoors.** Since fleas are likely to be present in lawns and other outdoor areas, it is imperative to spray (or dust) these locations. For most effective spraying of lawns, first mow the lawn and dispose of the clippings. Spray or dust following label directions. Do not water lawn for at least two days. Repeat treatment at one- or two-week intervals until the flea problem subsides. No matter how well you do in taking care of the problem indoors, if you ignore controlling fleas outdoors, you most surely will have the problem back indoors in a short time.

- **Pesticide Usage Indoors.** A number of household sprays are registered for this use indoors. Use them according to label instructions. They are particularly useful for areas where vacuuming is impossible or difficult (for example, certain cracks and crevices). Use sprays as a supplement to the other indoor procedures mentioned and not as the sole means of flea control. Repeat spraying at 7-10 day intervals.

If all of these steps are followed and a flea problem persists, it may indicate that you have a unique problem not easily remedied by the average homeowner and thus need the services of a professional pesticide applicator. Or, there may be a community flea problem that frustrates a good control program initiated by an individual within the community. Where such conditions exist, community action is necessary.

**Materials registered for flea control:**

- **Indoors.** DDVP, Baygon, resmethrin, and pyrethrin aerosol sprays (not to be used on animals). Ronnel in combination with other materials, utilized as a house fogger, is available through veterinarians, pest control operators, and some stores.

- **Outdoors.** Sevin or diazinon.

- **Animals.** Sevin, malathion, or rotenone dusts applied to animals and/or their bedding.

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*Assistance from Washington State University is available to all persons, without regard to race, color, or national origin.*

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Use pesticides with care. Read the label and follow its directions. Never smoke while using pesticides and avoid breathing the spray or dust. Wear natural rubber gloves when handling pesticides. Wash hands and face carefully with soap and water after applying. If insecticides are spilled on skin or clothing, remove contaminated clothing and wash skin thoroughly. Store pesticides in their original containers and be sure labels remain on the containers. Keep containers away from food or feed and out of reach of children or irresponsible persons.