Flea Information Sheet

What are fleas and how do I know if my pet has them?
Fleas are very small pests and the only thing you may notice is that your cat, dog or sometimes, even rabbit is suddenly very itchy. These small insects can cause your pet distress and are certainly worth treating early, as they are very skilled home invaders!
They are brown bloodsucking insects without wings that live within the fur of pets on the skin surface. Their lifecycle is completed off the pet in the house hence a multipronged approach is needed to clear an infestation!

Top Flea facts
• Adult fleas spend their whole life on their host and feed on their blood
• Before feeding fleas inject saliva into your pet’s skin, this can cause allergies to flea saliva
• Fleas can lay lots of eggs – 40-50 eggs per day!
• Female fleas can lay eggs within 24-36 hours of their first meal
• All these eggs can fall off and land in the soft furnishings
• Flea eggs can take up to a year to develop to adult fleas

How is it diagnosed?
You may see the fleas yourself moving quickly through your pets fur or you may see small black dots left behind each time your pet lies down somewhere, these dots are flea ‘dirt’ or excrement. The vet may perform something called a wet paper test to check for flea dirt,. Flea dirt is essentially dried bold so it will turn red when wetted with water.
Flea bites can be very itchy for your pet so you may notice them biting or scratching. Often dogs are more sensitive and reactive than cats, some cats will not scratch with fleas and can be a reservoir of infestation.

Do they bite humans?
Fleas very rarely stay on humans but they can bite people and you may notice small red dots if you have had a fleabite. Often people find fleabites around their ankles.

How are fleas treated and prevented?
There are many different flea products available, it is always better to purchase veterinary prescription products as many flea treatments that can be purchased from shops either do not work or can be dangerous if given incorrectly.

Spot on treatments: Spot on treatments are applied to the skin at the back of your pet’s neck, simply part the fur here and apply. They are applied in this position so as to prevent your pet from being able to lick the treatment off which
may cause toxicity. Always choose the correct product for your pets, NEVER APPLY A DOG FLEA PRODUCT TO A CAT. When using spot on treatments, try not to bath your pet for a couple of days afterwards and do not bath them too frequently after this. Swimming can reduce the efficacy of spot on products.

**Tablets & Collars:** Tablet treatments are available for treating fleas in cats and dogs, some of these will also treat ticks which can be very useful during Spring, Summer and early Autumn. Prescription flea collars that treat both fleas and ticks are available. These last up to 8 months and can be the most economic method of effective control.

**Injections:** Cats can be given a prescription flea injection, which lasts for 6 months. This does not kill the fleas on the cat but prevents their breeding which helps to control the burden of fleas in the household.

The most effective flea products are prescription only and as such are only available to registered pets who have been seen in the practice in the last 12 months. If your pet has not been seen by us for over a year then please book a free vet consultation with your pet for a flea check and to discuss flea treatments.

**Treating your Home**

Unfortunately fleas are very good at laying lots of eggs and which fall off your pet and can lie hidden in carpets, bedding and furniture. We would recommend treating your pet first then vacuuming all carpets and washing bedding. It can help to vacuum once then turn up your heating and put out lots of laundry to dry before vacuuming a second time! The humidity and vibrations can encourage eggs to hatch. Household flea sprays are also a very important part of treating fleas, use a flea spray to spray all other soft furnishings. Keep your pet safely out of the room during and after spraying. You can purchase household flea spray over the counter at Animal Health Centre. Don’t forget to treat the boot of your car too if your dog is infested!

Remember it can take up to 6 months to clear a heavy flea infestation so you must treat the house and all pets including dogs, cats, rabbits & ferrets – you must use a product that is safe for that particular species so ask the vet for guidance BEFORE using a product.

**What is a flea allergy?**

Some pets can be allergic to flea saliva and one bite may spark off a huge skin reaction causing lots of itching despite them being treated with flea spot on treatments and no longer having any live fleas on their skin. Please call us and book in an appointment with one of the vets to discuss if your pet develops any skin lesions.

This handout is a brief overview of how to manage those tricky fleas, if you would like any further advice then book in for a free flea check appointment or just give us a call at the practice for some advice on 0117 924 7832.