

# Spring Woes

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## Here Comes Spring, Here Comes Fleas

Few creatures can inflict more misery, ounce for ounce, than fleas. These tiny, almost-invisible pests can make life miserable and disrupt your household with a vicious cycle of biting and scratching. Fleas may also cause flea allergy dermatitis in some pets and may be carriers of dangerous diseases.

No matter what the weather is like outside, the climate inside your home is always perfect for supporting an entire population of fleas. That is why the doctors at Flanary Veterinary Clinic recommend your pet have protection applied monthly year round. Some favorite hiding places for fleas are your carpets, furniture, and drapes/curtains.

Although fleas can be found year round, typically the flea population explodes about 5 or 6 weeks after the weather starts to warm up.

Fleas have 4 stages to their life cycle. **Stage 1** is the **egg** stage. A female lays about 2,000 eggs in her lifetime. In one day, a single female flea can lay up to 50 eggs. The eggs are not sticky – some may quickly fall off your pet and into areas of your home. In 2 to 5 days, the eggs hatch.

**Stage 2** is the **larval** stage. After hatching, the larvae head toward dark places around your home and feed on “flea dirt” – excrement of the partially digested blood of your pet. The larvae grow, molt twice, then spin cocoons, where they grow to pupae.

**Stage 3** is the **pupa** stage. Immature fleas spend approximately 8 to 9 days in their cocoon. During this time, they continue to grow to adulthood, waiting for the signals that it is time to emerge.

**Stage 4** is the **adult** stage. Full-grown adults detect heat, vibrations and exhaled carbon dioxide (other than your pet who exhales CO<sub>2</sub>) from inside their cocoons, telling them a host is nearby. The adults leave their cocoons, hop onto a host, find a mate and begin the life cycle all over again. **The entire life cycle can be as short as 3 to 4 weeks.** That is why monthly flea control with Frontline will stop the flea cycle.

## *Flea Life Cycle Depicting All 4 Stages*



## **Warning Signs of Fleas**

Fleas are difficult to see, but you can certainly tell when they are around - - especially when they are on your pet.

One of the warning signs that your pet may have fleas is black specks. Black specks on your pet or in your dog's or cat's bed may be "flea dirt" - - the fecal matter from adult fleas. There are two easy ways to check for black specks. The first way is a flea comb available at most pet stores (the metal ones are the best). Run the comb over your pet, making sure the comb reaches the skin through the coat. If black specks are on the comb when you pull it off, they might be flea dirt. If fleas are on the comb, drown them in a bowl of soapy water before they can get away or jump back on your pet.

Another method is to place a white paper towel beneath your pet and rub your hands across its fur. If black specks appear on the towel, they may be flea dirt.

Another warning sign of possible flea infestation is agitation/scratching. If your pet is infested with fleas, he/she will become very nervous and annoyed and may scratch excessively.

If you find fleas on your pet, consult with Dr. Flanary, Dr. Walter or the Clinic staff immediately.



*"One flea can bite a dog or cat more than 400 times in a single day. There are more than 200 species of fleas in the United States."*

## **Some of the Ways Fleas Affect Your Pet's Health**

When a flea bites your dog or cat, it deposits a small amount of saliva in the skin. Your pet can develop Flea Allergy Dermatitis (FAD) in reaction to this saliva, which causes severe itching. In addition to your pet scratching or biting excessively around the tail, groin, or backside, scabs or bumps may also appear on your pet's neck or back.

Anemia occurs in young, older or ill pets if too many fleas suck their blood. The symptoms of anemia include pale gums, weakness, and lethargy in your pet.

One swallowed flea can lead to a daunting case of intestinal tapeworms in dogs and cats. The tapeworm is the most common flea ally. Tapeworms count on fleas to carry their larvae deep into enemy territory: your pet's intestine. Dogs and cats infected by tapeworm may have intense anal itching and weight loss. However, they may show no signs at all. You may notice the presence of tapeworm segments in your pet's stool or on his fur in the anal area (has the appearance of a small grain of rice). People can also be infected. As with pets, people may also have no symptoms. Even a non-reproducing flea can carry tapeworms, so this is another good reason to use a product on your pet that repels fleas as well as kills them.

Fleas also carry Cat Scratch Fever. Although cats usually have no signs of Cat Scratch Fever, it can be passed to people. Symptoms in infected people include a pustule at the infection site, low-grade fever, enlarged lymph nodes and listlessness.

FAD, anemia and tapeworms are the most common problems caused by fleas. Fleas were the carrier of bubonic plague and can carry Cat Scratch Fever. If you believe your pet is suffering from any of these ailments, consult with Dr. Flanary or Dr. Walter. If you are concerned about you or a family member being infected, contact your family physician

## ***The Battle Against Fleas and Ticks!***

The first thing that Flanary Veterinary Clinic recommends is monthly applications of Frontline Plus. Frontline Plus breaks the flea's life cycle by killing adult fleas before they can lay their eggs. It provides additional flea protection by keeping eggs and immature fleas from maturing into adults. Within 24 hours of application, your pet is protected. It also eliminates 100% of ticks before diseases may be transmitted.

Frontline Plus is applied just once a month and is completely waterproof. It must be applied 48 hours before or after your pet is bathed. Your pet can swim, get wet and even be bathed without the need for re-application. What's more, it is approved for use on puppies and kittens as young as 8 weeks old, so you can provide protection right from the start.

Frontline Plus does NOT enter the blood stream, so there cannot be a reaction. It works like a candlewick. Starting at the point of application, it uses the pet's body oil to wick down his body, hair follicle by hair follicle.

Applying Frontline Plus to your pet cannot be your only method of fighting fleas if you want to win the war on fleas. The battle must be waged on 3 fronts in both the Present and the Future: Pets, House and Yard: Now and Tomorrow.

Fleas can jump over 6 feet, and they enter the house by any carrier available: pets and humans. White clothing, socks, and sneakers excite and invite them right into the living room where they remain unseen and reproducing without your ever knowing until the problem is advanced.

-There are several things you can do to prevent an infestation of fleas and ticks.

-Treat your entire square footage indoors including garages, outbuildings, and doghouses or kennels.

-Frequently vacuum the areas your pet is around, especially carpeted areas in your home, any furniture that is frequented by your pet, and in your car (if your pet rides in your car). This will clean up as many immature fleas (eggs, larvae and pupae) as possible. If your home is already infested, there are commercial carpet aerosols, foggers, and powders made especially for the home front battle.

-Regularly wash your pet's bedding, blanket and other washable items in the hottest water possible (check the laundering instructions to make sure that washing in hot water is not a problem).

-Mow your lawn and rake up any leaves, brush or clippings. Leave no stone unturned, no hill unconquered. And pay particular attention to the areas where your pet spends his time outdoors. Your local nursery can give you tips on what sprays and insecticides are safe for use around pets and children.

Now that the battle has been fought and won, a plan needs to be formulated for preventing further infestations. Frontline Plus on your pet once a month and regular cleaning of the areas your pet inhabits will keep you from having to wage another full scale war.

*Fleas in their most resilient stage, the tiny hibernating cocoon, can live in your environment over a year without feeding and is protected by an impenetrable shell. It is this stage that survives most treatments and returns to breed and re-populate year after year.*

## ***Ticks: Another Problem***

Often too tiny to be seen, ticks attach to pets and feed on blood until they are engorged. They thrive in high humidity and moderate temperatures but can be found all over the country. Ticks may carry and transmit diseases, including Lyme disease and Ehrlichia that can cause serious health problems not only for your pet, but for your family as well.

Depending on the tick and environmental conditions, the life cycle of a tick can range from a few months to two years. Each developmental stage of a tick's life requires a blood meal in order to reach the next stage. Some species can survive for years without feeding.

There are 4 stages to a tick's life. **Stage 1** is the **egg** stage. Female ticks lay eggs in secluded areas where vegetation is dense and several inches high. Adult females of some tick species lay about 100 eggs at a time; others lay 3,000 to 6,000 eggs per batch. Regardless of species, tick eggs hatch in about two weeks.

**Stage 2** is the **larval** stage. After hatching, the larvae move into grass or shrubs in search of their first blood meal. If you or your pet passes by, they attach themselves and crawl upward in pursuit of an area of the skin that they can feed from. Then they drop off the host, back into the environment.

**Stage 3** is the **nymphal** stage. After finding their first blood meal, the larvae molt into their nymph stage and begin searching for another host. Nymphs are the size of a freckle and often go undetected, increasing the chance for disease transmission.

**Stage 4** is the **adult** stage. Once the nymph has had its blood meal, it matures into adulthood. Adult female ticks feed on a host for 8 to 12 days. In some cases, they will increase to 100 times their original weight while feeding. While still on the host, the female will mate, fall off and lay her eggs in a secluded place - - beginning the life cycle again.

Now at the Flanary Veterinary Clinic we have a simple blood test requiring only one drop of blood which tests for Heartworms, Ehrlichia, and Lyme's Disease so treatment can be initiated hopefully before damage is done.

### ***Life Cycle of the Tick***



"Remove ticks with tweezers, never with your hands."

*"Most people want to know how to solve the immediate crisis first. Start with fleas and ticks ON your pets. But don't stop there."*

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