

FLEAS & TICKS and HOW to CONTROL THEM

Fortunately for our pets, pet owners now have more choices and more quality products than ever for controlling and eliminating fleas.

But before you try yet another new “miracle” flea product that you’ve heard about on TV or from a friend, it’s important to understand fleas and their life cycle in order to effectively treat them. First, realize that there are 4 parts to a flea’s life cycle:

- 1) **Adult Fleas** ... which lay ...
- 2) **Eggs** ... which hatch into a ...
- 3) **Larva** ... which spins itself into a ...
- 4) **Pupa / Cocoon** ... from which the Adult flea emerges to start the cycle all over

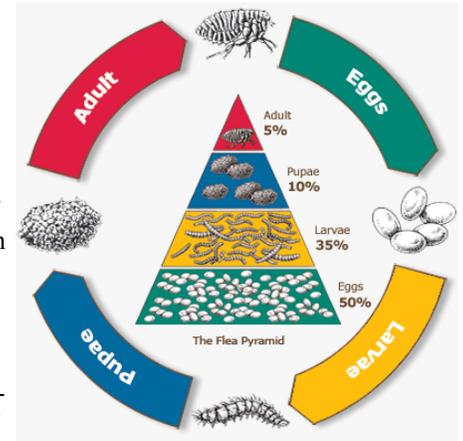
I know you must be thinking, “OK, Dr. Bob, why in the world should I care about the flea life cycle? What’s the big deal???” I just want to get rid of these doggone pesky fleas!”

How about if I told you that in a flea’s life cycle, only a very small percentage of time is spent in the adult flea stage. With ~95% of the time (see chart to the right) spent in the 3 other stages of development, wouldn’t it make sense to treat and eliminate the other parts of the life cycle to get firm control over the problem? You bet it would.

How will we do that? First, we have to start at the source.

So if possible, **we want to aggressively eliminate fleas before they have a chance to jump on our pets in the first place.** If you wait until fleas have already infested your dog or cat before you decide to attack the problem, then the work of getting rid of fleas from the environment becomes much more difficult.

So where is this source of fleas? Simply step outside into your yard or neighborhood ...



STEP 1 - TREAT THE OUTDOOR PREMISES (The Yard)

In the large majority of flea infestations, pets first pick up fleas outside, so if we target the areas where our pets spend time outdoors, we will solve a lot of our flea problems. Treating for fleas outside may not always be possible (for instance, if you live in an apartment complex, or if you live on several acres of land). But **if it’s possible, you must make an effort to eliminate fleas before they get onto your pet.**

I currently recommend an insecticide / chemical Bifenthrin, found in a few products such as **Ortho Home Defense MAX** and **Talstar**. It comes in both a liquid (used with a sprayer) or granules. Check with your local lawn & garden centers. Once it dries, it is safe around pets. It is very harmful to aquatic life (fish, frogs, etc), so avoid use around ponds, outdoor water features, etc. The absolute most important thing about using Bifenthrin (listen up, Guys!) is to **READ DIRECTIONS** on the product label before applying. And **please do not waste your money** or time with Sevin Dust ~ my Dad was using it way back in the 1960’s ~ it hasn’t been effective against fleas for many, many years.

One other thing: be aware that fleas prefer shady yards more than a yard in full sun. So if you have lots of shade, you’ll need to be more aggressive with your treatment of the yard. And keeping the grass cut helps makes a difference, too.

STEP 2 - TREAT INSIDE THE HOUSE

The most important thing to know about treating the house is to treat 2 times. The 2nd treatment must be 2 to 3 weeks after the first treatment. The reason for this goes back to the flea life cycle. While there are several products that kill fleas, flea eggs and flea larvae, there are no effective products that kill flea pupae (cocoon) since they are bundled up in a protective cover. So the 2nd treatment is necessary to kill the new fleas that have just emerged from the pupa.

For treating your house, I highly recommend **KnockOut Area Treatment** (\$21 - safer around cats) or **KnockOut E.S. Area Treatment** (\$24 - more potent). Both versions of KnockOut will kill adult fleas as well as prevent flea eggs from hatching, and they kill the flea larva as well. One canister treats about 2000 sq ft of space. Used as directed and following my advice above (2 treatments applied 2 to 3 weeks apart), these products should effectively eliminate a problem in your house. We have both of these products available at our weekly events and on our “SHOP” on our website www.CarolinaValuePetCare.com.

To treat hardwood, tile or vinyl floors, vacuuming thoroughly can be effective. Carpeted areas and rugs need more attention, however. It’s important to **use a spray that you apply directly to infested areas.** If there are areas of the house where the pets NEVER go, you shouldn’t need to treat these areas. Fleas will remain in close vicinity to the pets since they want an easy meal.

Before treating your home, put your vacuum cleaner to work. The vacuum will either suck up the flea pupae (with fleas still developing in them), or the *vibration* will actually stimulate adult fleas to hatch from the pupa / cocoon stage. Be sure to remove the vacuum cleaner bag and dispose of it in an airtight container outside of your home. If you have a bagless vacuum, empty the contents into an airtight container and put it in the garbage can outside, and then clean the container outdoors with soapy water.

Wait a couple of hours after vacuuming, then aggressively treat the house using a spray while going room-to-room to treat. It’s crucial to treat those hard-to-get-to areas; lift up sofa and chair cushions and spray thoroughly ... spray under furniture ... remove the sheets from beds and wash them ... spray around and under the bed thoroughly. You get the idea. While treating the house, be sure to keep your pets in the kitchen, outside, screened porch or in a utility room away from the spray until it dries.

Wait 2 to 3 weeks, then repeat the treatment.

But whatever you do ... **Do NOT rely on foggers/ flea bombs, unless** you are treating an empty (or nearly empty) room. Think about it. A fogger simply sprays a mist (fog) into the air. The mist from a fogger will then land on the tops of furniture, beds, desks, dressers, chairs etc. **It will not penetrate into the areas where fleas, flea eggs and larvae will be.** Since fleas and flea eggs aren’t on top of the furniture, beds, desks, etc, why treat these areas? So, use a product like KnockOut to treat your house.

STEP 3 - TREAT YOUR PETS

With so many choices for treating our pets nowadays, how do you choose from all the available products ???

First, let's look at traditional methods:

- 1) Flea Sprays—can be messy; they're loaded with alcohol (which, of course, will sting your pet if they have sores on the skin); pets (especially cats) generally don't like them; and with a couple of exceptions, they only last an hour or so
- 2) Flea Shampoos—they can kill fleas and wash off flea eggs and larva, and help relieve your pet's skin, BUT when you rinse them off, you wash the insecticide down the drain ! Once your pet is dry, fleas in the area can jump right back onto your pet
- 3) Flea Collars—The ONLY one worth considering is Seresto. Pricey but good. For Ticks, we carry Scalibor, good for 6 months

Now, what about some of the newer products * Understand that none of these are flea repellants, so fleas must get on your pet before they will die, and even then, they will not die immediately ! Be patient. And again, if at all possible, treat the premises.**

- 1) **Bravecto (Dogs & Cats)** - The newest weapon against fleas, this is a chewable pill (Dogs) and topical liquid (Cats) that kills fleas and 3 species of ticks for **3 months** ! (and 2 months vs. Lone Star ticks). For dogs that are tricky to pill, it's easier since it's given every 3 months ... not monthly. Bravecto starts killing fleas within 2 hours after being given. It's also the ONLY flea product that is FDA-approved for use in pregnant and nursing females ! Pets must be at least 6 months of age and a minimum weight (4.4 lbs for Dogs ... 2.2 lbs for Cats). If I had to choose one product, this would be the one since it is so safe and so effective.
- 2) **Activyl Topical Liquid (Dogs and Cats) ... Activyl TickPlus (Dogs only)** - This is an excellent once-a-month topical liquid for both dogs and cats. Its active ingredient is unlike any other product on the market (it is NOT at all similar to Frontline), so there is no known flea resistance. Dr. Michael Dryden, the world's leading authority on fleas, has repeatedly tested Activyl on a colony of 'super-fleas' that he created, and Activyl's effectiveness in killing these super-fleas was outstanding ! Pets should not be bathed a day before or a day after applying Activyl. Activyl is quite liquid and goes away fairly quickly once it is applied. For dogs only, we also offer **Activyl TickPlus** that combines flea control plus kills ticks. Because of the chemical ingredient to kill ticks, it will leave a more oily residue on your pet's fur than Activyl alone.
- 3) **Comfortis Tablets (Dogs and Cats)** - This once-a-month tablet does an excellent job of killing fleas, starting in only 30 minutes. It's a great choice for dogs that swim a lot, pets with persistent dry skin, or where pet owners are reluctant to apply the topical products because of young children in the house, etc. It does NOT kill ticks, or flea eggs or larva.
- 4) **Trifexis Tablets (Dogs only)** - Trifexis contains the same active ingredient as Comfortis to kill fleas, but has the added benefit of providing Heartworm prevention as well as treating and controlling 3 intestinal worms (Hookworms, Roundworms and Whipworms). It is given as a monthly pill. It is not labeled to kill ticks, or flea eggs or flea larva.
- 5) **Sentinel & Sentinel Spectrum (Dogs Only)** - This once-a-month tablet combines heartworm prevention; treatment + control of whips, rounds, hooks (and w/ Spectrum, tapeworms); and prevents flea eggs from hatching. It does NOT kill adult fleas or ticks.
- 6) **Capstar (Dogs and Cats)** - For a fast and very effective way to kill fleas, Capstar can be a valuable product. And it's safe for both puppies & kittens. The big limitation is that it works for ~24 hours ONLY (1 day).
- 7) **Revolution (Cats and Dogs)** - We see good results with Revolution, another topical liquid. Additionally, Revolution prevents Heartworm disease and (in cats) prevents Round and Hookworms. It is also labeled to kill American Dog Ticks. But here in NC, we also have problems with 3 other kinds of ticks, so be aware that it may not kill all ticks. It also treats and controls Ear Mites. Revolution works by being absorbed into the skin to work inside the body, so avoid using it on pets that are in poor health.
- 8) **Advantage Multi (Dogs)** - Another once-a-month topical liquid that is effective against fleas. It also prevents heartworms, as well as treats / prevents Roundworms, Hookworms and Whipworms.

There are plenty of other flea products available, but most work very poorly. We offer what we believe to be the best of what's available for your pets. There is NO one BEST product out there. Each one has its benefits and its limitations.

FLEA FAQ'S

What are the ideal conditions for fleas to thrive and reproduce ? For fleas to develop and reproduce, they require 3 conditions:

- 1) Humidity - That's a given here in the Carolinas throughout the summer and early autumn months
- 2) Heat (But not too much) - Fleas actually prefer temperatures that are in the mid- to upper-80's, not the 90's
- 3) Moisture - A crucial need for fleas is the right amount of rainfall. If the weather is really hot and really dry, our flea problems are not nearly as bad as when we have lots of mid-to-upper 80 degree days with occasional rain and storms.

What is the peak season when fleas are at their worst ?

Autumn ! Most pet owners think the flea season is at its peak in the summer months, but here in the Carolinas, the worst time of year for fleas is typically in September, October and deep into November. So don't stop treating for fleas until late in the year !

When does the flea season begin ?

Most years, we start seeing fleas in May, a few more in June and July, even more in August, and that all leads up to the usual busy Autumn season for fleas. Of course, we sometimes see pets with fleas year-round, but only if owners have not treated their house.

When will the flea season end ?

Fleas will continue to live outdoors until we get a hard, killing frost, which usually occurs between Halloween and Christmas. Indoors, fleas can live year-round, although the low humidity in our homes in the winter months slows down their activity.

What about the tick season ? We start seeing ticks as early as February, and they peak in June-July. Their numbers fall off quite a bit in August, and we seldom see ticks in the autumn months.