



# How to make flea infestations a fleeting memory

**F**leas have been a plague for ages—doesn't the worry over them ever go away? Nope. They continue to be problematic, mainly because they can quickly invade anywhere pets hang out. If you've seen adult fleas on your dog or cat, your house or yard is likely infested with much higher numbers of fleas in juvenile stages (i.e. eggs, larvae or pupae) that live unattached to your pet. These juvenile-stage fleas may survive for long periods—up to months—and without treatment, infestations can continue as long as pets or other animals are available as a food source for these biting bugs.

## Flea infestation fallout

Several species of fleas can infest pets, but the most common one found on cats and dogs is the cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felis*. In addition to skin irritation, fleas can also cause anemia and, in certain situations, death—especially when young animals experience large infestations. Adding insult to irritation, fleas can spread multiple pathogens such as tapeworms, cat scratch fever bacteria and other bacterial diseases that can infect both pets and people.

## Flea riders

Fleas may be brought into your house by cats allowed both indoors and outdoors or by visiting pets. Infestations that take root outside your house may be caused by stray or feral pets, including feral cat colonies and wildlife populations.

If an infested pet enters your house or yard, the flea riders can easily colonize your property with flea eggs, leading to eventual infestation of the pets within the house. So if one of your pets has fleas or if any flea life stage is found close to your house, all of your pets need to be treated and environmental control measures should be taken.

## Getting back to flea-free

Environmental control consists of:

- > A thorough cleaning that involves repeated vacuuming of flooring, rugs and carpeting (and disposing of the vacuum bags as soon as possible once finished)
- > Washing and drying pet beds, rugs and toys
- > Using indoor and outdoor flea sprays, being sure to follow the manufacturer's directions (or you can hire a licensed exterminator).

As for your pets, you'll need to work with your veterinarian to kill the fleas they have now and prevent future fleas (keep in mind that your pet and your property will likely need more than one treatment). This will usually involve flea preventives and insecticides including foams, aerosols and liquids.

## How to be flea-free from the get-go

Given how difficult it is to treat flea infestations, using monthly flea and tick preventives, ensuring your property is unattractive to wildlife (see [dvm360.com/fleamagnet](http://dvm360.com/fleamagnet)) and keeping cats indoors are simple but effective preventive measures that are well worth the effort.