

## IMPORTANT FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FLEAS

**DESCRIPTION:** Fleas are parasites, feeding directly on man or other warm blooded animals. Usually you or your pet serve as these "hosts". A flea can jump 7-8 inches vertically and 14-16 inches horizontally. A skin reaction to a flea bite would be a slightly raised, red, itching spot. Sometimes bleeding does occur. Fleas usually require warm and humid conditions to develop. Due to the flea cycle and weather conditions many people don't realize they have a flea problem until they return home from vacation or a move to new premises and are confronted by "hungry fleas". There are several types of fleas but the most common is the cat flea even on dogs. Fleas are attracted to body heat, movement, and carbon dioxide exhaled.

**APPEARANCE:** The average size ranges from 1/12-1/6 inch long, being very small and without wings. Their bodies are narrow if you view it from the sides allowing them for movement in narrow areas. Because their bodies are covered with spines projecting backward, they are difficult to remove by shaking or scratching.



**HABITS AND BIOLOGY:** Fleas go through a complete metamorphosis. There are four distinct stages: eggs, larvae, pupae, and adult. Flea eggs are laid on the host or are deposited on the floor or ground surface. They also are often found in upholstery or pet's bedding. A female flea will continue to lay a few eggs every day until she has reached up to 200-400 eggs. These eggs will develop into flea larvae from 2 days to several weeks, depending on the temperature and humidity. Flea larvae are active and look like maggots. The larvae will feed on organic debris, but particularly like to feed on feces of the adult fleas. This "flea diet" contains undigested blood. The flea larvae are hard to spot and are found deep into the carpets or the cracks and crevices of floors and upholstery. They are very difficult to vacuum, becoming entwined in the carpet fibers. The next stage called the pupae will look like a cocoon, also hard to spot. No spray will kill flea pupae, but a vacuum cleaner can pull them up. Under warm conditions many adult fleas will emerge from this protective cocoon with 7-14 days, longer under less favorable conditions. This flea cycle from eggs through the adult stage is generally 30-60 days. It is critical to break the flea cycle as soon as possible. The insect growth regulators do break the cycle, but at the larvae stage. You have several weeks of the pupae, continuing to hatch out so a good residual insecticide is needed to kill the emerging adults. Many times you need to spray the residual insecticide again, because the emerging pupae can be very forceful.

**CONTROL:** The best time to start a **flea control program** is in the late spring, prior to an infestation. Since adult fleas comprise only 5% of the total flea population. To contain an infestation, fleas must be controlled: Whenever you see adult fleas crawling on your pet, it is only a symptom of a much larger problem. Current studies indicate that adult fleas account for only 5% of the total flea population in any given situation. Eggs account for 50%, larvae account for about 35%, and the remaining 10% are the pupal cocoons. That means that for every single adult flea living on your dog or cat, there are 10 eggs, 7 larvae, and 2 cocoons.

