

# Ask A Vet: Fleas are Trouble - Big Trouble!

*Sunday, August 17, 2014*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

Our dog was scratching incessantly recently and then we found fleas all over him. We have tried a couple of the grocery store flea collars and drops, but nothing seems to be working. Help!

-Desperate and Itchy

Dear Desperate,

Fleas are awful parasites that not only cause itching and scratching, but can transmit certain diseases or other parasites like tapeworms. Getting rid of them can be quite a chore and requires a fair bit of work, but can be accomplished. I will mention that sometimes it is necessary to contact a pest company to help deal with the infestation, but there are things that you can try. First, it is important to get a safe and effective flea insecticide on your dog. Most flea collars/sprays/powders are not very effective. Flea shampoos will kill fleas currently on your pet, but lose efficacy almost immediately after your dog is dry. There are many products out there, some claiming to be "as good as the veterinary formulations". That is rarely true, and sometimes the products purchased cheap at grocery stores can cause your dog or cat to become very sick. Every week many of these sick dogs and cats are seen, and some even die. You can contact your veterinarian for what he/she recommends.

Only approximately 10% of the fleas in the environment will be on your dog at any given time. Therefore it is vital to also treat your house. Wash any bedding or blankets that your dog sleeps on. Vacuuming helps to remove eggs, larvae, and pupae (the other flea life cycles) from the carpet. If you have a bagless vacuum, dump the contents immediately into a bag and take outside to the garbage. If you have a bagged vacuum, immediately remove the bag and take to the trash outside. This will prevent any of the emerging fleas from hatching inside your vacuum and re-infesting your carpets. There are many area sprays and fumigation bombs that are also necessary to use in the house. Focus on carpeted areas and under baseboards. It is important to find a spray that is safe for use around pets. Most of the sprays should say that they work for 1-3 months, and that they contain an IGR or Insect Growth Regulator. This component prevents flea eggs from hatching for up to 7 months. I usually advise my clients to make sure to treat the pets and the environment monthly for 3-4 months to ensure that all of the various stages of the flea have been killed and removed from the house.

When it comes to fleas, prevention is truly the best method. A few fleas can easily turn into an infestation of thousands very quickly. For more information or guidance on preventatives, contact your regular veterinarian.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman