Veterinary Advice About Flea Control

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

What is the best way to prevent a flea infestation?

Dr. Smith: "Most veterinarians today recommend topical flea prevention products like Frontline® Plus, Advantage®, Advantix®, or bioSpot. These once-a-month liquid solutions that you apply directly on the skin of your pet's back and neck provide excellent protection against infestations, will eliminate any fleas already on your pet, and are easy to use. Flea collars such as the Seresto collar, can also provide good protection, but in areas where fleas are prevalent, the topical products have historically been more effective.

Keeping the grass in your yard mown and using yard flea sprays in areas your pet frequents are also helpful."

Can't I just wait until my dog has fleas and then eliminate them?

Dr. Smith: "If you wait until you see fleas on your dog, you're too late. Now you have a flea problem that is a lot harder - and more expensive - to deal with. For every flea you see on your pet, there may be hundreds more in your home. Fleas often hitch a ride on your pet into your home and jump off to live in your carpet, furniture, or your pet's bed, reproducing in higher and higher numbers.

With fleas, prevention is critical. Don't wait. Start your pet on a flea prevention program and don't stop until at least two months after the first hard frost. If you live in a warmer climate, keep your pet on a flea prevention program year-round. Eliminating a problem often means repeatedly treating the home and spraying the yard."

Are fleas harmful to my dog?

Dr. Smith: "They can be. The most common medical problem with fleas is Flea Allergy Dermatitis (FAD), which can cause extreme itching and discomfort in dogs. Dogs with atopy (inhaled and contact allergies) are more likely to develop FAD.

"When dogs itch, they scratch themselves with their nails or chew on the area that itches. Scratching and biting can lead to hair loss, skin abrasions, and potential infection. And think of their quality of life. If you've ever experienced the itch from a sunburn that peels, think about how miserable you would be if that's how your life was day in and day out."

"Severe infestations can also cause anemia from blood loss, especially in puppies and kittens, and there is also a risk of tapeworms, which fleas also transmit."

Can I use more than one flea and tick product on my dog?

Dr. Smith: "Maybe. In most cases, one product should do the job. However, there are some situations in which using two products together can be more effective. Refer to our compatibility chart as a guide for which products may be able to be used together, and consult your veterinarian if you are unsure."

How do I know if my pet has fleas?

Dr. Smith: "The easiest way to tell if your pet has fleas is by seeing adult fleas on your pet or the flea feces (often called "flea dirt") on your pet's skin. Brush your pet

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over a damp white sheet or paper towel and look closely under the hair and on the skin for small dark specks. Flea feces contain digested blood and they will turn a reddish brown color when moistened with a small amount of water."

"Flea combs, which have very narrow teeth, are also effective in determining if your pet has fleas."

Do flea control products also control ticks?

Dr. Smith: "Many do. Some even help repel mosquitoes. As you probably know, ticks can transmit a number of diseases, including Lyme Disease, and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, while mosquitoes can be carriers of West Nile Virus and Heartworm - all of which can be very serious diseases. We recommend choosing a topical monthly product like K9 Advantix® II which provides the broadest protection possible against these different potentially dangerous pests. It is important to also use a monthly heartworm preventative. A flea and tick preventative that also repels mosquitoes does not provide adequate protection against deadly heartworm disease."

What time of year should I use flea and tick products?

Dr. Smith: "Start your prevention program a month before the warm spring weather arrives if you live in the northern portion of the country, and don't quit too early. Many people stop using flea products as soon as it gets cool outside and wind up fighting a flea infestation. If you live in the southern states, protect your pet every month, all year."

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