The Important Difference Between Dog & Cat Flea Products

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Why it's important to use a product formulated for felines

the difference between dog and cat flea products

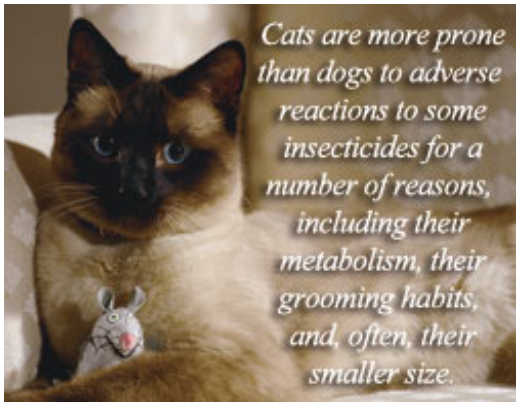
Even though fleas are a common cat concern, regular preventive treatment can stave off these disease-carrying pests. However, when you have both cats and dogs in your home, it's important to understand that the treatment you use on your dog can be harmful if used on your cat.

The flea preventives we recommend for cats include ingredients that eliminate adult fleas (insecticides) and either Insect Growth Regulators (IGRs) or Insect Development Inhibitors (IDIs), which prevent juvenile fleas from developing into biting adults. IGRs and IDIs act on receptors that are present only in insects, not in mammals.

Some insecticides in dog flea treatments can be harmful to cats. Reading labels is important, and it can be tricky. For instance, a common insecticide made from chrysanthemums and found in over-the-counter cat flea preventives is called "pyrethrin." Most cats generally do not react to pyrethrins unless they are in a concentrated form, as they are in some dog flea preventives.

The name of another insecticide, however, that is found only in dog preventives and also in some environmental flea control items sounds a lot like the word pyrethrin, but is vastly different. This insecticide is called "permethrin" and it is actually a synthetic pyrethrin that is stronger, with a longer lasting effect.

Products containing permethrin, as well as other ingredients at higher concentrations and labeled "for dogs only," should never be used on cats. Cats have a very sensitive metabolism, so using these products on cats or even allowing your cat close contact with a dog that has been recently treated should be avoided.



1. Always read labels. Sometimes labels are written in a confusing way or may be too small to read entirely. If there is any doubt of your understanding the label instructions, contact your veterinarian or the manufacturer. Be aware of age requirements and remember never use a product "for dogs only" on your cat.

2. Be cautious when using any flea preventive on senior cats or cats who are not at their peak of health. Your veterinarian may recommend the avoidance of any insecticides and using a flea comb or other non-chemical means. Consult your veterinarian for guidelines on use of flea and tick products on pregnant or nursing cats.

3. Never use a product with permethrin on your cat. Although these products have a wide margin of safety for dogs, they

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

3 can be toxic to cats. Cats exposed to permethrin can develop tremors and/or seizures within hours of application. If you suspect your cat has been exposed to permethrin or other insecticides toxic to cats, see your veterinarian immediately.

4 Always observe your cat after applying any flea preventive. If you witness unusual behavior, weakness, shakiness or any other behavior you are not sure of, contact your veterinarian.

5 When using an environmental spray or fogger, remove any cats (and other pets as well) from the premises for as long as the label states. Make sure all food and water dishes are put away and that food is unable to be exposed to the product. Make sure to air out the premises completely before letting any pets back into the treated area. If you do not understand the usage of an environmental flea control product, we recommend you contact the manufacturer or your veterinarian to explain it before you use it.

We firmly believe that using a cat-formulated flea preventive is the best guard against a flea problem. We recommend monthly topicals to our clients and offer several effective choices for cats.

Frontline® Plus for Cats

Advantage® II for Cats

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*