

# Flea Control and Prevention

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Adult fleas spend most of their time on an animal, but flea eggs, larvae, and pupae are most often found in the pet's environment - especially in carpeting, bedding, and under furniture edges. For every flea that you see on your pet, there are likely to be hundreds of eggs and larvae in your home and yard. Therefore, a truly effective flea control program always includes treating the environment as well as treating your pet. These are the essential steps for a successful flea control program:

2. Remove fleas from the indoor environment.
3. Remove fleas from the outdoor environment.
4. Remove fleas from pets.
5. Keep immature forms of fleas from developing.

## Flea Control in the Indoor Environment

Indoor flea control involves mechanically removing all stages of the fleas, killing any remaining adults, and preventing immature forms from developing.

1. Start by vacuuming thoroughly, especially below drapes, under furniture edges, and where your pet sleeps. It is estimated that vacuuming can remove up to 50% of flea eggs. Vacuum daily in high traffic areas, weekly in others. Each time, seal your vacuum bag in a plastic bag and discard it immediately. Do **NOT** place mothballs or flea collars in the vacuum, since toxic fumes could result.
2. Use a product that will kill any remaining adult fleas and also stop the development of eggs and larvae. You will need a product that contains both an adulticide and an insect growth regulator (IGR), such as Nylar (pyriproxyfen) or methoprene. This can be in the form of [carpet powders, foggers, or sprays](#).

[Foggers](#) are especially good for large open areas. Surface sprays can reach areas such as baseboards, moldings, cracks, and under furniture where foggers cannot reach. Choose the product(s) you use with care, taking into account the presence of children, fish, birds, persons with asthma, etc. Your veterinarian can help you choose the appropriate products for your situation.

3. Wash your pet's bedding weekly and treat the bed and surrounding area with a product that contains both an adulticide and an insect growth regulator such as [Bayer Advantage® Carpet & Upholstery Spot Spray](#).
4. Do not forget to also clean and treat your automobile, pet carrier, garage, basement, or any other place your pet spends time.

## Flea Control in the Outdoor Environment

Flea control in the [outdoor environment](#) is the next step in eliminating a flea problem and generally involves treating the yard and kennel areas with outdoor sprays. Fleas tend to like areas that are moist, warm, shady, and where there is organic debris. They will also tend to be where pets spend more of their outdoor time so be sure to concentrate on areas such as patios, under porches, dog houses, etc. Rake away any organic debris such as leaves, straw, grass clippings, etc., to disturb flea habitat and allow any flea and tick product you use outdoors to penetrate. You may need to treat the yard every 7 to 14 days depending on the product. Regardless of the product used, remember not to spray where runoff could go into lakes, rivers or fish ponds. Read the label on all insecticides thoroughly and apply them as directed.

## Flea Control on Your Pet

Now that we've taken care of the fleas in your home and treated the "hot spots" in your yard, it's time to eliminate the fleas that are on your pet. There are a number of flea control products for use on pets, including once-a-month topical products, sprays, dips, shampoos, collars, and oral products. With any product applied directly to the pet, please remember that you may see some live fleas on your pet for a short time after spraying, shampooing, dipping, etc. In order for the fleas to die, they must come into contact with the insecticide, and absorb it.

Keep in mind that until all of the fleas in your home have died, you will probably still see some fleas, even on a treated pet, since some immature forms may continue to develop. This is especially true if you had a big flea problem to start with. Persistence is the key here. It is essential to keep following an effective flea control program for a long enough time to get rid of all of the fleas, in all life stages. This may take several months to a year, depending on your particular situation.

- **Once-a-month Topicals:** [Once-a-month topical insecticides](#) are applied to a small area on your pet's back, are probably the easiest product to use, and generally last the longest. Some kill fleas and ticks, and others just kill fleas, so check the label carefully. Ingredients generally include permethrin, pyrethrin, or fipronil. Examples of these products include [Advantage® II Topical Flea Treatment for Dogs](#) and [Frontline® Plus](#). Since many dog products can be very harmful if used on cats, read the label carefully. **Remember:** Do NOT use products containing permethrins on cats.



- **Sprays:** Flea and tick control sprays can come as aerosols or pump bottles. Choose a product that contains both an adulticide and an insect growth regulator. Follow your veterinarian's and the manufacturer's directions on how often to spray, and spray in a well-ventilated area.
- **Dips:** Dips and rinses are applied to the entire animal. They generally have some residual activity. They should be applied in a well-ventilated area according to your veterinarian's and the manufacturer's directions. It is helpful to put cotton balls in the pet's ears and ophthalmic ointment in the pet's eyes. Even with these precautions, be very careful not to get any of the product in the pet's ears or eyes. Dips or rinses may contain pyrethrins, permethrins or organophosphates.
- **Shampoos:** [Flea and tick shampoos](#) help to primarily rid the pet of the adult fleas and ticks he already has on him. Most shampoos have little to no residual activity. To properly use a flea & tick shampoo you must be sure to work the shampoo in over the entire body and then leave it on at least 10 minutes before you rinse it off. Shampoos often contain pyrethrins.
- **Collars:** [Flea & Tick Collars](#) can be effective, but must be applied properly. To get the right degree of snugness, you should just be able to get two fingers between the collar and your pet's neck. Be sure to cut off any excess portion of the collar after you have properly applied it. Otherwise, that animal or other pets may try to chew on the end. Check the package for information on duration of effectiveness since some collars lose effectiveness when they get wet, e.g., if your dog swims a lot. Some dogs experience irritation under the collar. If this occurs, you may need to use a different product.
- **Oral Products:** To kill adult fleas on pets fast, another option is a product called [Capstar](#). This product comes in tablet form and is especially useful in situations where pets are more likely to be exposed to fleas, such as at dog parks or shows. Because Capstar is out of your pet's system in 24 hours, it should be followed with a longer-lasting product that will work on both adult and immature fleas, such as [Frontline® Plus](#).
- **Flea Combs:** [Flea combs](#) are often overlooked as a valuable tool for removing fleas. Your pet will love the extra, hands-on attention he gets as you comb through his coat. Be sure to choose a comb with narrowly spaced teeth. Comb your pet and then place any fleas you find into detergent water, which will kill them.

## PREVENTION --- PREVENTION --- PREVENTION

Following an effective flea control program is the only way to win the fight against a flea infestation. Keep up with the steps outlined above, and your pet and your home will eventually be flea-free. After winning the battle of controlling an existing flea problem, we're sure you will agree that the best flea control strategy is always flea prevention.