Stories From Our Clinic: The Traveling Flea Circus

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

For every single flea you spot hopping around, there are nearly 100 more that you don't see, either as an egg, larva, juvenile, or adult.

Pam had just gotten back from a trip she had taken across the country with her Border Collie, Allie. On the way home, she stopped at a dear friend's house in Florida, where she let Allie play with her friend's dogs. All was well for a few days after she came home, until Allie started biting the area around her tail and scratching more than usual. Pam didn't think it was dry skin because she was feeding a quality food and had been giving Allie Vitacaps® for the past two years, so Pam decided to have Allie checked. That's where we came in.

We examined Allie and did our usual test for fleas – combing her with a flea comb and then placing what we collected on a moist paper towel. The test turned out positive: the brown specks we had seen became reddish when moistened. While Pam was relieved that it wasn't something more serious, she was afraid that she had brought these pests to her house, her pets, and her roommate's pets. We told her that she may have caught the infestation in the early stages.

We explained the flea life cycle to Pam. We told her there are four stages in the development of fleas: eggs, larvae, pupae, and adults – and that the eggs are often laid on the pet, although they fall into the environment. We also explained that about two days after the egg is laid, it hatches into a larva before it passes through several developmental stages, which takes about a week. At that time, the larva starts spinning a cocoon – called a pupa – that is sticky and can be found deep in carpet or crevices. The pupa develops into an adult and emerges from the cocoon when it senses vibrations, carbon dioxide, or warmth, which tells it an animal host is near. The entire life cycle takes about 15 days.

First, we told Pam to vacuum the whole house and to make sure she disposed of the vacuum bags outside immediately after she vacuumed. We suggested that she spray areas where Allie spent the most time with a flea spray. We recommended a product that kills adult fleas and also stops the development of eggs and

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larvae – something that contained both an adulticide and an insect growth regulator (IGR), for instance.

Using a monthly topical or oral flea preventative is also essential for getting a flea infestation under control. We recommended that going forward, all animals in the household be treated with a preventative every month year round.

Pam soon reported that she had found no more fleas on Allie and the other pets had not scratched at all.

Recommended Flea Control Products

K9 Advantix® II

Bayer Advantage® Environmental Treatments

Drs. Foster & Smith Advanced Formula Flea & Tick Shampoo

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