Our Recommended Flea and Tick Prevention Options

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

As veterinarians, we believe that consistent use of a good flea and tick preventive is absolutely your best weapon to help protect your pet against the serious health problems fleas and ticks can cause. Prevention is always easier and often less expensive than treatment.

(watch video)

Because fleas go through several stages in their life cycle once they have infested your pet and/or your home, it can take many months of persistent treatment to completely get rid of them. For the many dogs and cats that have an allergy to flea saliva, the bite from just one flea can cause days of intense itching. Tick-borne diseases can be life-threatening and are sometimes difficult to completely treat. Some people mistakenly think that giving their dog a yearly Lyme vaccine is adequate coverage, but there are other dangerous diseases (Anaplasmosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Babesiosis) that ticks can carry, also. In addition, veterinary research is now finding that one individual tick may carry several different diseases.

We recommend flea and tick preventives as your first line of defense. While it is true that most flea and tick preventives contain insecticides, it is also true that these products have come a long way over the years, in both safety and effectiveness. Used properly according to the manufacturer's directions, we believe they are a very useful tool to help protect your pet against the serious problems fleas and ticks can cause.

We especially like topical spot-ons. Our personal favorite, and the one that Dr. Foster and I use on our dogs, is K9 Advantix® II. Because it contains permethrin, it is labeled to kill and repel not only fleas and ticks but also mosquitoes, carriers

*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.*

of heartworm and West Nile disease. Apply in small amounts in one or two places on the skin. It spreads out over the entire body, moving into the tiny sebaceous (oil) glands located just below the skin surface, near the root of each hair. The product binds with the skin oils and over the next month it is slowly distributed back onto the surface of the skin. These products last for 30 days and some, such as Frontline Plus® and K9 Advantix® II, are labeled to be water-resistant, so they are especially useful for dogs that swim or have frequent baths. Keep in mind that these products must come in contact with skin oils to work, so be sure to part the hair and apply the product directly to the skin.

If fleas are a big concern, we always stress that it is essential to use a product that will completely break the flea life cycle. Using a product that just kills adult fleas is not enough, because the eggs and larvae that remain will soon mature into biting adults, causing the same problems over again. Products that contain Insect Growth Regulators (IGRs) (such as methoprene in Frontline Plus) or Insect Development Inhibitors (IDIs) (such as lufenuron in Program®) prevent the development of immature forms of the flea, effectively breaking the life cycle. Especially for people who live where fleas are a big concern, we recommend choosing a product (such as Frontline Plus, K9 Advantix II, or Bio Spot® Defense Spot On® For Dogs) that contains an ingredient that will work on immature fleas. These products also kill ticks.

In cases where ticks are the only concern, or during years where the tick population is especially high, we highly recommend the Preventic Collar, which contains the ingredient Amitraz. This product kills ticks and if needed, may be combined with certain flea and tick spot-on products for extra effectiveness against ticks.

In some situations where the pet has very little opportunity to pick up ticks or fleas, such as for an indoor-only cat or a dog that only goes outside to go to the bathroom and spends the rest of its time inside, people have asked us to suggest a product that works only on adult fleas. In these cases, we recommend the spot-ons Advantage II or the oral product Program (in pills for dogs or a flavored liquid for cats), or the oral prescription product Comfortis.

As always, choose products based on your pet's individual needs, and read all directions completely before using. Flea and tick preventives, properly used, can be a great help in keeping your pet in the best health possible.

*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.*