



Fleas are an ever-present problem in our area, and must be fought year-round. Successful flea control and treatment involves keeping your pets up to date on quality preventatives, and treatment of the environment.

Flea Life Cycle

The flea life cycle has four stages: egg, larvae, pupae, and adult. The adult fleas are the only ones that live on a host; all other stages stay in the environment until adulthood. When an adult flea lays eggs, they immediately fall off of the host to the environment. They stay here for up to 10 days until they hatch. Ideal hatching environment is 75–85°F with 50–90% humidity. After hatching, the flea enters the larval stage, during which they burrow down into the environment to escape the light. In a home, this means burrowing deep into the carpets/couch cushions, under furniture, or along baseboards.

They stay in the larval stage for up to 12 days, after which they spin a cocoon to begin the pupal stage. Under ideal circumstances they will hatch as adult fleas after 1–4 weeks. However, they can stay dormant for up to 9 months before emerging. Things such as vibration, pressure, and heat stimulate the pupae to hatch. Once the adult flea emerges, they must find a host within 4 days. Once they find a host, they begin feeding within the first 10 seconds, and can begin laying eggs within just two days. One adult female flea can lay 40–50 eggs in a single day, and can live up to 100 days.

Dangers of Fleas

Fleas are not only a nuisance—they can cause serious health risks to you and your pets! One adult flea can eat up to 15 times its body weight in blood every day. For young/old/immune-compromised animals, this can very quickly lead to severe anemia, which can be life-threatening. For healthy animals, prolonged exposure can also lead to severe anemia.

Some cats and dogs develop allergic reactions to flea bites (“flea allergy dermatitis”), and can develop severe skin infections as a result from over-itching at flea bites. Additionally, the species of flea most commonly seen on cats and dogs acts as the host for tapeworms, which are easily transferable to both animals and humans.

Treating the Outbreak

To combat fleas, you must treat both your pets and their environment. Always consult your veterinarian for pet treatments - many over-the-counter options are ineffective. We recommend vet-prescribed products like Revolution, Nexgard, or Frontline Plus. **Never use dog medications on cats, as they can be fatal.**

While flea preventatives kill adult fleas, they don't affect eggs, larvae, or pupae. For these life stages, use environmental treatments containing insect growth regulators (IGRs) to stop larval development. Note that pupae must hatch to be eliminated - vacuuming helps trigger hatching (dispose of vacuum contents outside immediately).

For thorough environmental treatment:

1. Use foggers for large areas (but they miss cracks/cushions)
2. Spray baseboards and furniture (remove/laundry cushion covers in hot, bleached water)
3. Wash all pet and human bedding in hot water with bleach

Don't forget outdoor areas! **Fleas can enter yards via wildlife.** Treat shady spots, sheds, and overgrown areas with IGR products if pets go outside. Always follow product instructions carefully - some require temporary evacuation during treatment.

After Treating

Between foster animals: After completing treatment and observing no fleas on household pets for one week, notify the Foster Manager to arrange your next foster placement.

With current fosters: If treatment is needed while hosting an animal, please inform us so we can temporarily house your foster at AHS for treatment day.

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ashevillehumane.org/get-involved/foster/resources

Created by Mallory Uzel and Evie Schenkel for Asheville Humane Society

