



## **PEST CONTROL FACTS - FLEAS**

There are around 2500 different species of fleas described worldwide with another 500-awaiting classification. The flea of modern homes in the Western World is the cat flea, responsible for around 70% of all flea complaints. Other species include the dog flea, found on humans and pets, particularly in their bedding, and the human flea, is also found on humans, in bedrooms and is capable of breeding on pigs, badgers, foxes and hedgehogs.

Fleas vary in size from 1mm, such as the rabbit flea, to the mole flea that can be up to 8mm. Fleas vary from being light brown in colour to nearly black although most encountered in the work of a pest control operator are a reddish brown.

Fleas have well developed muscles in the hind limbs and a unique skeletal structure which are special adaptations for jumping. Fleas have no wings

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# PEST CONTROL FLEAS

## LIFECYCLE

A single female is capable of producing several hundred eggs in her life-span. The eggs hatch after about a week and the legless, white thread like larvae feed on organic waste including undigested blood and excreta left by adult fleas.

## NUISANCE PEST

Fleas will often go unnoticed until, towards August and September, either people are bitten or pets begin to suffer. When very hungry, fleas will jump onto people (not their preferred host) feed a little on blood, then leap off again to await a more suitable host. Bites to humans can cause intense reddened irritation around a central red spot which can last for up to 2 days. First bites are not usually responsible for serious reactions although subsequent ones may lead to hypersensitivity among some people.

## LARVAE

After about 2-3 weeks the larvae begin to spin cocoons in which they pupate. It is thought that up to 50% of all skin diseases suffered by cats and dogs are caused by allergic reactions to flea bites which attack all pets at one time or another during their life. Fleas are capable of spreading serious disease. The most critical of these being the infectious Bubonic plague, transmitted to man by the rodent flea that carries the causative bacillus from infected rats. This flea is responsible for carrying murine typhus. While disease transmission is still prevalent it is now the case that fleas are considered more of an irritation.

## CONTROL

Flea control is best directed at the free-living stages, when the flea is not on the host. Effective control means halting the flea life cycle rather than just treating the adult flea.

The correct flea control measures can only be decided once the level of infestation has been determined. Other possible hosts need to be identified. Birds' nests for instance are a common source of fleas outside the home.

Before applying any treatment, floors and furniture must be thoroughly cleaned and vacuumed. Particular attention should be given to pets' bedding and places where pets frequent.

Domestic pets should also be regularly treated with an appropriate veterinary product. Infested clothing, beds and bedding should be destroyed or thoroughly cleaned and accumulations of debris destroyed.

Treatments can be carried out by using conventional residual insecticides or with a combined treatment using an insect growth regulator (IGR). Where the infestation has occurred as a result of a rodent problem, suitable rodenticides should be used.