

Fleas

Advice leaflet about Fleas

There are approximately 60 species of fleas in Britain. All are bloodsuckers and temporary parasites of warm-blooded animals, mainly mammals, but a few will feed on birds. Fleas usually require a specific host, but will often feed on other animals if their preferred host is not available. The cat flea is by far the most common of the flea species and readily likes humans.

Appearance

Fleas are flattened from side to side, a useful adaptation that enables them to move easily through the hairs or feathers of the host and they are well known for their jumping capability. Their colour varies from a light brown to almost black, but they are normally a reddish brown. Their body lengths range from 1-8mm and are slightly oval in shape. Most fleas have a pair of small simple eyes, but some are blind, usually those that live underground. The flea, although wing-less, can jump great distances for its size, over 200 times its own body length.

Life Cycle

The life cycle of the flea usually takes place in the resting-place of the host, in the nest, or burrow, or other habitation. Eggs are laid by the female and are white and oval in shape 0.5mm in length. The female may live for several months and lay 20-39 eggs per day.

The egg hatches in about a week, depending on the temperature. The small maggot like larvae search for food, feeding on organic remains that may include undigested blood left by the adult.

The larvae grow and when adult lie in wait for a passing host. The pupa may remain dormant for up to 6 months. This complete cycle takes about a month if conditions are right. Adult fleas feed on blood and their bites can cause intense irritation at the bite site. Of all the fleas the cat flea is responsible for 75% of all flea infestations.

Control Methods

As all development stages of the flea will be found in the habitat of the host, it is essential that this area is thoroughly treated. If there is any pet that might carry fleas then this animal must be treated using an insecticidal shampoo or powder obtainable from your veterinarian. The bedding of the animal must be cleaned regularly. If you use a vacuum then it is advisable to use a small amount of crawling insect powder inside the bag.

Fleas can only breed where the host animal is present. If you remove a cat from the premises, eventually any cat flea infestation will die, out of its inability to breed, although they can still bite humans.

Where fleas are found in a property where there are no pets, then a careful search for old birds nests in the loft or eaves may prove worth while. If there is a heavy infestation it may be necessary to call on the services of a pest control contractor.

Local Authority Service

If you do not wish to try to deal with an infestation yourself, the Environmental Health Department does offer a service, although there is a charge for this. If you would like a Pest Control Officer to visit to treat the infestation, please telephone the department on **01799 510370** to make an appointment. A fixed standard charge is made to cover this service. Also should the initial treatment be unsuccessful within two weeks one further treatment will be carried out to at no extra cost.

We accept the following credit/debit cards: VISA, VISA DELTA, MASTERCARD, SWITCH. Please have your details ready when requesting an appointment.

All products used by the Council are approved for use on domestic and commercial premises under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. Alternatively, there are a number of private pest control companies that will also do this work, and you can find more details from the local telephone directory.