

Fleas are very common, and it is likely that all dogs and cats will be affected by them at some stage of their life. Usually the warmer summer months are the time when most complaints are made regarding fleas, but they can remain active during the whole year in warm environments.

If you suspect your pet of having fleas, you should obtain a suitable product for treating them. Products available from the vet such as Frontline Spot On or something similar seem to work best, they can be easily applied and work for over a month, after which time they need to be re-applied.

It is always advisable to treat the whole house with a residual insecticide if the occupants are experiencing bites to their ankles etc. This is usually an indication that there are numbers of fleas in their juvenile stages in the carpets or cracks and crevices within the home.

Start by giving the house a thorough vacuuming, including using any attachments to clean around skirting board edges and under cushions of soft furnishings. Once done the vacuum cleaner or its internal bag should be emptied/changed and the contents placed "outside" in the bin. Pay particular attention to areas where the pet frequents most, such as its basket or chairs on which it sleeps.

Try not to have piles of clothing, bedding, etc. stacked up in corners as these areas may provide harbourage for various flea stages. Remove toys, video-tapes and all small items from the floor, including suitcases or toys/games from under beds. This will allow more efficient vacuuming and enable any insecticide to reach these areas.

Numerous insecticide formulations are available from the large d.i.y. stores and various other outlets. Most types of crawling insect spray or ant spray can be lightly applied to floor areas including carpets and laminates but first check the label to see if it mentions that it can be used for the control of fleas and its suitability to be used on the type of flooring you have. Do **not** use a spray containing lacquer as these are sticky and smelly and may mark certain items. You can usually identify these products as the last few letters of their product name is lac. Eg. insectlac.

After clearing the floor areas and vacuuming you can now lightly spray the whole of the floors. Start in a corner holding the spray about 18 inches above the floor and work your way out of the room. This is best done just before you go out in the morning as this will give the spray time to dry and the smell to go before you return.

Alternatively, do upstairs when you first get up in the morning and the downstairs just before you go to bed. If you have to walk on the wet insecticide make sure you wear shoes and keep pets off until dry. It is also advisable to treat under the cushions of soft furnishing and the underside of chairs, settees etc.

Fleas have a remarkable survival technique, which enables them to stay in their pupal cases (cocoon) and delay emerging as an adult biting flea until circumstances are more suitable. In cold conditions when there is no heating in the property and nobody walking around to create the vibrations necessary for stimulating the fleas into hatching, they are able to survive for over a year, just waiting for their next blood meal to arrive.

Under normal conditions, when the property is reasonably warm with people and pets moving around, it takes on average between four to six weeks from eggs being laid to the emergence of adult biting fleas.

This means that once a property has been treated with an insecticide, even in warm conditions with plenty of activity in the home etc. it will still take a number of weeks before all the fleas have matured and hatched out. Only after hatching will the fleas contact the insecticide and only then if it has not been vacuumed up.

If the property is treated with a professional insecticide product the residual activity will still be sufficient to kill any emerging fleas for several weeks after its application, depending on the surface it is applied to. This will allow for the time it takes for juvenile stages to reach maturity and hatch. However, most tins of insecticide- spray sold for domestic use have a limited residual life, consequently you would have to re-spray the floors on a weekly basis to ensure the best results (vacuuming first).

If an empty property is treated for fleas, it is important that someone walks around all of the rooms at least three to four times per week to stimulate the fleas into hatching. In colder months some form of heating would also need to be arranged.

Always use insecticides safely by following the manufacturers directions.