

Fleas and Flea Control

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Fleas are the bane of every dog and cat owner. Adult fleas are external parasites of warm-blooded animals. They bite people and pets. The bite often results in swelling and prolonged itching. Adult fleas must get a blood meal to finish development. However, they can survive unfed for long periods waiting for a warm-blooded animal to wander close by. This is why vacant premises can remain infested for extended periods of time. Immature or larval fleas look like small white worms. They don't bite but instead feed on hair, shed skin, and dried blood in the animal's bedding or nest.



Flea control program

Step 1: Vacuum rugs, drapes and furniture *thoroughly* using a vacuum cleaner in good working order and a fresh dust bag. Pay particular attention to areas where pets sleep. Discard the dust bag outside because it contains fleas, flea larvae and eggs that may re-infest the house.

Step 2: Treat rugs, drapes, and furniture, and any outdoor sleeping areas (like a dog house) with one of several flea sprays that contain methoprene, or other IGR (see below), as one of the active ingredients. Use these products according to label instructions. The spray may contain other insecticides (usually a pyrethroid) but it must contain an insect growth regulator to be most effective. One of the trade names for methoprene is Precor.

Insect Growth Regulators (IGRS) act by disrupting flea development from larvae to adults. Non-biting larvae never develop into adults and eventually die. IGRs are virtually nontoxic to humans and pets and are long-lasting (up to 7 months or more by some reports). The downside of IGRs is that they are slow-acting. For this reason they frequently are combined with other faster-acting insecticides to knock down biting adult fleas.

Step 3: Dip or shampoo your pet with a good quality flea shampoo or dip at the same time you are doing steps 1 and 2. Repeat the shampoo or dip in a few weeks if you notice adult fleas again.

Use of flea collars. Flea collars don't have much value against fleas-especially if the home is infested.

Outdoor treatments. According to the best current information, outdoor insecticide treatments are usually *unnecessary* and of little value in the Pacific Northwest unless the outdoor area is a kennel or a very small yard. This is because fleas are nest parasites and do not survive for long away from their animal host.

Use of foggers or bombs. Aerosol foggers or "bombs" have become a popular

way for homeowners to dispense insecticides. However, bombs do a poor job of coverage because they essentially throw the insecticide into the air thereby treating only exposed surfaces where it lands. On the other hand, liquid formulations carefully applied with some type of pressure applicator will achieve much better coverage and might even be less expensive.

Pet-applied flea products. There currently are three products that are applied directly to pets. Two products, Advantage and Frontline are applied to the animal's coat whereas Program is given in pill form. All are available through veterinarians. While these products can be effective the three step program outlines above is still recommended to rid the dwelling of fleas and is the least expensive approach.

Pet-Applied Flea Control Products

Product (active ingredient)	Application	Comments
Program (lufenuron) Sentinel (milbemycin oxime + lufenuron)	taken orally once-a-month	requires Rx; must be used in combination with other flea control methods; all dogs and cats in household must be treated.
Frontline (fipronil)	spray or lotion applied to coat	controls fleas and ticks on pets; should be used in combination with other methods.
Advantage (imidacloprid)	lotion applied to coat	controls fleas; re-apply once a- month; should be used in combination with other methods.
Capstar (nitenpyram)	Taken orally	controls fleas; can be used on young or adult dogs or cats.