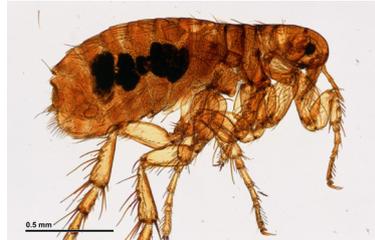


# TICKS, FLEAS & MITES



Fleas, ticks and mites are a very common problem for many pet owners that can exist all year round and in some animals can be the cause of unpleasant skin conditions and some of these parasites also carry human health implications.



## What are fleas?

A flea is a small, reddish brown, wingless insect, which feeds off the blood of mammals. This includes dogs, cats and rabbits but can also occasionally include humans. Although they are small they can be seen with the naked eye and are about 1-3mm long with flat bodies and very powerful back legs which allow them to jump huge distances.

## Life Cycle

1. Adult fleas start to lay eggs within 24 hours of their first meal on your pet
2. Eggs fall off your pet and into the environment where they hatch and develop into larvae
3. The larvae then develop into a pupa which can stick very tightly to carpet fibres and soft furnishings
4. Pupa are very resistant and may take nearly a year to hatch into the new adult
5. Adult fleas hatch from the pupa in response to certain conditions such as warmth, humidity, movement and carbon dioxide

## Signs

If your dog or cat is itching or you have felt yourself being bitten try the following checks:

- Part the fur on your pet and look closely at the skin surface as fleas will leave behind faeces which look like small black grains
- Brush the coat with a very fine toothed flea comb to collect the debris
- Put the coat brushings on a wet piece of white paper and wait for a minute
- If flea dirt is present then the faeces (which are dried blood) will dissolve and create reddish brown circles on the paper

## Other problems caused by fleas

- Flea Allergic Dermatitis (FAD) - Some pets can be allergic to fleas and in these cases a single flea bite can cause them to be very itchy and uncomfortable. Over grooming as a response to irritation can lead to hair loss and shortened rough patches of fur, most commonly seen on their backs near the base of the tail.





- Tapeworm infection - The *Dipylidium caninum* tapeworm cannot complete its lifecycle without the flea and although it is unlikely to cause severe illness in the majority of pets is it possible that humans can become infected too.
- Myxomatosis in rabbits - This disease is nearly always fatal, affecting a large part of the wild rabbit population. Fleas are able to transmit this disease between wild and domestic rabbits so it is important to try and minimise contact between them and myxomatosis can be prevented with regular vaccination.

### Treatment and prevention

There are a variety of preparations available to control and prevent fleas so there should be one preferred by your pet and with ease of use for you.

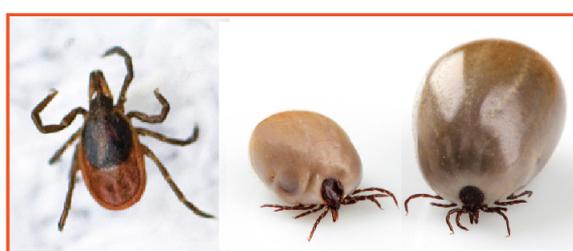
### If you already have a flea problem then there are two main aims of treatment:

Kill any adult fleas on your pet to stop them biting

Break the life cycle to stop more adult fleas hatching

Reducing the number of fleas in the environment is very important and household flea sprays designed for this purpose can be very effective. However, the pupal stages of the life cycle can be very resistant and to maximise the effect of these sprays, the day before try placing damp towels over hot radiators to raise the temperature and increase humidity and vacuum the carpet to create vibrations.

Once you have identified a problem you will have to ensure rigorous flea control for a further 12 months before you can be confident that it has resolved.



Unfed tick

Fed (engorged) tick

### Ticks

Ticks are particularly prevalent in woods and moorland and different types of tick have evolved to feed on different animals. However, they can live and feed from several different animals in their lifetime so can spread diseases from one animal to another. The likelihood of your pet being exposed will depend on the type of environment they visit and the other animals that live there. Ticks feed by latching onto the animal, piercing the skin and sucking blood.





### How to spot ticks

Despite their small size, as a tick feeds it increases in size and you may often notice a single engorged tick as a grey coloured nodule attached to your pet. There may be many ticks attached at one time, especially around the face, ears and front legs. It is important to remove them correctly using a specialised tick remover tool as other methods can either leave the head embedded in the skin or stress the tick both of which can lead to infection.

### Ticks and travelling

In many EU countries, travelling dogs are at risk from diseases transmitted by ticks transmitted diseases which can be serious. It is essential to discuss control options with the vet before travelling abroad.

### Treatment

Tick control should be considered for all pets, but especially those travelling abroad or visiting high risk areas of the UK, such as woods and moorland. Most treatments work by killing or repel ticks but it is best to discuss with us which product would be most suitable for your pet's lifestyle.



### Mites

These are very small parasites that will often only be seen with magnification using a microscope. They live within or on the skin, often causing intense irritation, which can be seen on your pet as the result of self-damage through scratching and biting.

- Sarcoptes - known as the mange mite, it is relatively common in dogs but rare in cats, causing severe irritation and is highly contagious may pass to humans
- Ear Mites (otodectes) - live on the skin lining the ear canal of dogs and cats, causing very itchy ears that produce a lot of thick brown waxy discharge
- Cheyletiella - often referred to as 'walking dandruff', can affect humans and produces an itchy, scurfy skin mainly on the body
- Harvest Mites - are common in late summer and often found on the head and legs of dogs and cats after walking through long grass and are distinctly recognisable as clusters of bright orange
- Demodex - are found within the hair follicles and sebaceous (skin) glands but they are not contagious and only tend to cause disease when the immune system is suppressed

### Treatment and Prevention

Diagnosis of mite infestations can sometimes be difficult and treatment protocols will vary according to the type of mite. It is very important that you advise us if your pet shows any increase in scratching or itching, especially if there are also signs of skin or hair damage.

### Summary

Fleas, ticks and mites are common parasites of dogs and cats. Preventing an infestation is important and routine prevention should form part of normal preventative healthcare. The most suitable product and regime may vary according to your pet's lifestyle so please discuss this with us before embarking on any treatment.

