

FAST FLEA FACTS

What are fleas?

Fleas are tiny wingless insects that feed on your pet as well as other animals.

- **If you see evidence of fleas on your pet, it is essential to eradicate them as quickly as possible**, before the population grows.
- Hungry fleas sometimes bite humans too, leaving small, red, itchy bumps most commonly observed on the wrists and ankles.
- Flea bites make some pets that are allergic to flea saliva so miserable that they bite and scratch themselves raw. This is called flea allergy dermatitis or FAD for short.

How can you tell if your pet has fleas?

You may actually see the dark fleas, about the size of sesame seeds, scurrying about on the skin.

- Their favorite spots include the base of the ears and the rump. Look closely at sparsely haired places like the groin for telltale signs.
- A more accurate way to diagnose fleas, however, when live ones aren't observed, is to part the fur in several places and look for tiny black specks about the size of poppy seeds.
 - These specks are flea feces, composed of digested blood. If you're not sure whether you're looking at "flea dirt" or just plain dirt, place it on a damp piece of white tissue. After a minute or so, a small red spot or halo will become apparent if it's flea feces, since the blood re-hydrates and diffuses into the tissue.

Getting Rid of Fleas: On your pet, in your home and in your environment

Getting rid of fleas entails killing them on your pet as well in the environment. For this, you may need an armament of products.

The use of a topical flea product is essential to quickly kill fleas and stop them from biting your pet. You can purchase products such as Advantage, Advantix, and Seresto collars in the Santa Barbara Humane Society shelter office. Other products are also available from your vet.

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When using a topical product it is important to keep in mind the following guidelines:

- Always treat all of the pets in the house: one untreated pet can prolong the infestation.
- Make sure to use your flea product year round - this is Santa Barbara, so there is no "flea season" here. Being a mild, warm climate, fleas will be active even in the winter months. Seresto collars are ideal for year-round treatment because they work continuously for up to 8 months.
- Make sure to invert the cap on the product to break the seal on the tube so that the product can be dispensed from it.
- If you bathe your pet, make sure to use only an oatmeal-based shampoo.
- If your pet swims on a regular basis (four or more times a week) you may want to reapply Advantage more frequently for adequate flea control during the summer months. Advantage can be applied as frequently as weekly if it is needed.

It is necessary to treat not only your pet for fleas, but also the environment in which you live

- Flea larvae can live in your carpet for an extended period of time (up to nine months!) and hatch out quickly. You may not see them, but when the first warm weather hits, you will know that you have an infestation.
- Premise sprays or powders can be applied throughout the house.
- Thorough vacuuming before home treatment is recommended; discard the vacuum bag once this job is finished.
- It is important to treat all areas where the pet has traveled, since flea eggs and larvae may be present on the floor or furniture. A yard or kennel spray may be used to kill outside fleas.
- **You must understand that just killing fleas on your pet is not enough to prevent the infestation from repeating itself.** Flea eggs may survive several weeks after live adults have been eliminated, therefore, repeat treatments may be necessary. Sometimes it is best to consult a professional exterminator if the infestation in your house is severe.

Be aware that fleas spread tapeworm infections. A tapeworm is an intestinal parasite that can infect your pet or even a human. If a flea that is infected is swallowed, a tapeworm infection may develop. Make sure to have your pet checked if you suspect a tapeworm infection.

This handout has been adapted with permission from Bayer Animal Health.