

What every Feline Family should know:

Preventing & eliminating FLEAS

Fleas make pets' lives miserable, and people itch at the mere thought of them. The cat flea, (*Ctenocephalides felis*) is the most common and infests dogs, cats, humans, other mammals and birds. Fleas thrive in warm, moist environments and feed off of blood. Flea saliva (like that



of other biting insects) contains an ingredient that softens (or "digests") the host's skin and causes the characteristic itch. Fleas are flat with hair-like bristles on their bodies and three pairs of legs that give them their extraordinary jumping ability.

Excessive scratching may be a sign your cat has fleas

In Michigan, the flea season begins in April and concludes in November; fall is the worst part of the season when many indoor-only cats become infested. Look for these signs:

- Excessive licking or scratching, possibly causing raw skin or scabs.
- Fleas diving in and out of your cat's fur; they tend to congregate around the head and rear-end.
- "Flea dirt" or flea excrement that looks like ordinary dirt. Comb or ruffle your cat's fur over a white surface and sprinkle with water. If it's flea dirt, you'll see a red color, which is digested blood, a definitive diagnosis.

See your veterinarian to start prevention early

It's 100 times easier to PREVENT fleas than to kill them (which often includes treating your home!). See your veterinarian to prevent fleas with a flea control regimen like Advantage® or Revolution® before the start of flea season.

Act quickly if you suspect fleas

Once your cat is infested with fleas, they must be treated. See your veterinarian immediately to confirm your suspicions and for a prescription. We typically recommend:

- Topical treatments for cats including Advantage® and Revolution®, both applied to the base of your cat's head monthly to kill fleas and stop new ones from hatching. Both are applied high up so that the cat cannot lick the spot. **NOTE:** As with any medication, reactions can occur. If your cat experiences any vomiting, labored breathing or lethargy following application of any flea treatment, contact your veterinarian or emergency hospital immediately.
- Oral Medications like Program® and Sentinel® stop flea larva from hatching. However these medications do NOT kill adult fleas and must be used along with adult-killing treatments (such as Advantage® and Revolution®).

Avoid potentially dangerous over-the-counter products

Many over-the-counter flea products (medications and collars), do not follow safety guidelines of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and can cause severe reactions and hair loss. Shampoos and dips have no lasting effect and, without a topical treatment, fleas will return. (However shampoos are often used with very young kittens.) Flea collars use either a toxic gas or a substance absorbed into the cat's fat layer with little permanent effect. (But they are good at eliminating fleas in your home – see below!)

Treat microenvironments in your home

Flea control doesn't stop with your pet. Only 10% of the flea population in your home is on your pet. Flea eggs can infest carpeting, bedding and living areas. Remove fleas from your home by:

- Spraying all carpet, hard surfaces, bedding, pet sleeping areas and rugs with a safe-to-use premise spray (such as Siphotrol®).
- Vacuuming daily with a flea collar in the vacuum bag. Be sure to empty the bag frequently or more fleas will hatch, leave the vacuum and re-infest your home!
- Wash all bedding, clothing and removable furniture covers in hot water. (Dry clean where indicated.)

Copyright © The Cat Practice 2013



875 S. Worth, Birmingham, MI 48009 • 248-540-3390 • thecatpracticepc.com

NOTE: Our "Feline Family" series covers many important topics to help your feline family members live longer, better and healthier lives. For other topics, or more information, go to www.thecatpracticepc.com or call us at 248-540-3390.