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Summer Means A Time For Fleas

The most common type of flea in Texas is the cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felis* (Bouché). However, there are other flea species in Texas, including the dog flea, *Ctenocephalides canis* (Curtis), and the oriental rat flea, *Xenopsylla cheopis* (Rothschild). All of these fleas are around 1/8 inches in length, dark brown in color and have a wingless, flattened body.

Flea eggs are laid on a furred host after consuming the host's blood. The white round eggs fall off of the host onto the ground in the area where the host spends time and rests. Whitish, legless larvae hatch from eggs in 2 to 3 weeks. The larvae develop in 9 to 15 days under optimum conditions. Fully developed larvae will then pupate by spinning a cocoon of silk that becomes covered with soil particles and debris. This protects the pupa and makes them hard to detect. The pupal stage lasts from 7 days up to a year before the adults emerge. Under optimum temperature and humidity conditions, fleas can complete their lifecycle from egg to adult in 30 to 75 days.

Adult mouthparts are modified for piercing and sucking blood, so they can bite multiple times. Not only are flea bites irritating due to an itchy reaction, but fleas can also transmit diseases such as murine typhus.

Sometimes buildings can become infested with fleas even when there are no pets around. Other animals such as bats, roof rats, squirrels and raccoons commonly have fleas and may bring them into structures. The building should be inspected and all openings should be sealed so wildlife can not enter.

Non-Chemical Control Suggestions:

Change pet bedding regularly and vacuum thoroughly. Vacuum under furniture, cushions, chairs, beds, and along walls. Make sure to discard vacuum cleaner bags at least once a week, since fleas can continue to develop inside vacuum cleaner bags.

Some Chemical Control Suggestions:

Treat your pets. Treatments are available as sprays, spot-ons, pills or food additives for pets. With all products, read and follow label directions carefully. Products designed for use on adult dogs should not be used on puppies or cats, unless specified on the label.

Treating homes. The pet's living area should be treated at the same time that the pet is treated. This will hopefully prevent re-infestation of the pet. Citrus sprays containing d-limonene is one suggestion that can be applied to rugs, carpeting and pet bedding. Also, insect growth regulators such as methoprene and pyriproxyfen can be used indoors. Methoprene is unstable in sunlight so it is an effective indoor treatment. However pyriproxyfen sprays, can be applied both indoors and outdoors. Outdoors, treat areas where pets spend most of their time, such as bedding areas or under shade trees.

Remember to inspect your pet regularly for fleas and carefully follow the label directions on the insecticide products!



Photo of a cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felis* (Bouche) (Siphonaptera: Pulicidae). Photo by R. Meola, Texas A&M University.

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