



LIESSE ANIMAL CLINIC

11575 Côte de Liesse Road, Dorval, Québec, H9P 1B4 ~ (514) 631-1533

<http://www.liesseanimalclinic.com> ~ info@liesseanimalclinic.com

Dr. R. J. Langill ~ *Serving the community since 1950*

THE LIFE OF THE DOG AND CAT FLEA

The very mention of fleas causes most of us to start itching and scratching ourselves. Luckily, the adult flea is an obligate parasite, so it must live on the pet at all times, or it will die.

Adult fleas are either male or female. Adult female fleas must feed on blood every 12 hours, and only dog or cat blood will do. The female fleas mate with the males, and lay eggs for 3 weeks. She will lay 5 to 10 eggs at a time, 3 or 4 times daily... a total of about 600 eggs. The eggs are laid on the pet. After a few days, the eggs dry and fall into the pets environment, most commonly where the pet sleeps and rests. A few days later, the eggs hatch into larva, and they feed on the flea dirt (droppings) that have also fallen off in this area. These larva spin a cocoon in about 1 week, and transform into a pupa. These pupa may stay in *suspended animation*, and will only hatch into a flea when the timing is right... when there is warmth and movement in the area. These newly hatched fleas are somewhat indiscriminate, and if people are being bitten by fleas, it is usually at this stage of the life cycle.

Fleas will live indoors in heated houses, all year long. They cannot survive outside in the cold winter weather. The pupa, however is resistant to the cold, and will live through the winter, and hatch the next summer. As a general rule, flea season can begin as early as June or July with the problem getting progressively worse into the Fall, until the frosts of November decimate the outside population.

The flea itself is small, but can be seen darting through the pets hair coat. The best place to look is on the back, just above the tail. Our pets will bite at, and eat the fleas in their coat, so it is often difficult to find live fleas on the pet. Rather, you will more likely find black specks in the coat that are often curling in appearance, and which are actually flea droppings. These flea droppings, or *flea dirt*, can be brushed out of the pets coat onto a white surface to make them easier to see. If there is any doubt as to whether this pepper like material is flea dirt, add a drop or two of water; because flea

droppings contain dried blood, and the water will turn red if the fleas are indeed the source of the dirt.

The commonest sign for an owner to notice that their pet has fleas is scratching, or chewing at their fur. It is important to note that not all pets with fleas will scratch, and not all scratching pets have fleas.

The most important thing in treating and controlling flea infestations is that *treating the pet alone will not solve the problem*. The areas that the pet sleeps and rests must be treated to destroy the eggs, larva and pupa that are here, ready to hatch into another batch of fleas.

Fleas are an awful problem to greet us each summer, but by discussing your particular pet's needs with your veterinarian early, this problem can be easily prevented, and properly treated.