

# Fleas

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Fleas are a common problem in Hong Kong. They are hard bodied, wingless, blood sucking parasitic insects whose constant biting causes extreme irritation to your dog or cat. In addition, fleas' saliva contains a substance to which many small animals are highly sensitive. In severe infestation there is inflammation, loss of hair and other allergic symptoms. Fleas can also be involved in spreading tapeworms.

## The Life Cycle of the Flea

To be able to eradicate fleas we need to know how they live. We know that they feed and lay eggs on your pets (an estimated 20 per day!) which are shaken off in the surrounding carpets and bedding. These then develop into larvae and pupae. Depending on environmental conditions adults can hatch from the pupae in anything from 2 weeks to 20 months!

## Treatment

In the past, treatment for fleas sometimes seemed to be ineffective. Insecticidal powders, washes and sprays were applied to the animal's coat to kill the fleas. Unfortunately this didn't deal with all the young fleas in the carpets and bedding which rapidly replaced the fleas which were killed.

Similarly, the old types of aerosols for spraying in the house killed the adult fleas, but could not get at the very resistant larvae and pupae. New sprays are now available, with some using natural plant extracts are now available. These sprays contain growth inhibiting hormones, which kill flea eggs and adults.

A combination of different types of treatment appears to be the ideal way to control fleas. Sprays and washes are generally used as a first line of defense. Monthly treatments with a topical applicator, such as Frontline Spot On, is a very useful and convenient method in preventive treatment. In particularly heavy infestations it is very important to treat the home with spraying or fumigation. Flea combs and flea collars may also be useful, but generally are only useful against adult fleas.

In chronic situations, a severe flea infestation may cause skin disease known as flea dermatitis. It can make the animal feel quite miserable and itchy. In some circumstances it may be required to treat the animal medically as well.