

## The Battle Begins

As spring approaches for many pet owners, the battles lines are drawn. The never ending war against fleas and ticks will once again begin. This is a war we will probably never win but if we can beat the enemy back for another year we will have succeeded.

Fortunately, we have an ever changing arsenal to use against our foe so choose your weapons well. Knowing a little about fleas may help in your plan of attack. Fleas and ticks get on your pet in order to obtain a blood meal allowing them to lay eggs, creating a whole new generation of the pests. Adult fleas make up only 5% in the fleas life cycle. They live for 50 days but may begin laying eggs within two days after feeding, producing up to 50 eggs per day. The eggs then fall off your pet into the house or yard, hatching in 10 days and developing into a larval stage that matures for 2 additional weeks. The resulting pupae live for 4-5 months allowing the fleas to over-winter. The best flea control programs break the life cycle in multiple places.

Sprays and dips- Most of the dips and sprays on the market have insecticides that have been used for many years resulting in resistance. They are often difficult to apply and have duration of one to 7 days. Of the available products they are the least expensive. Topicals- Several of the newer topical products work well. These are applied to the skin in one to two locations where they mix with the animals body oils coating the outside of the pet. Once distributed it is safe for you and your family to come in contact with your pet. Different products have varying degrees of efficacy and safety. They may be packaged alone or in combination with other products.

Insect Growth regulators- These compounds may be used alone or in combination with a product that kills adult fleas. They cause the egg, larva or pupae stages to die or become inactive thereby preventing the completion of the cycle to the adult stage. These products work especially well where the pet does not get repeated exposure to a new source of adult fleas.

Orals- Recently, oral tablets have been approved for use in dogs. These medications vary in duration from 24 hours to 1 month. They are easy to administer but are not effective against ticks and long durations orals are not yet approved for cats. These are the fastest acting of the flea products.

Collars- Like the dips, the insecticides in flea collars have been around a long time causing resistance. Flea collars therefore work poorly. There are some tick collars containing amitraz that do work well against ticks but are not effective against fleas.

Area treatments- Since fleas spend such a small percentage of their time on the animal it may be necessary to treat the environment in which your pet lives. There are a variety of area sprays and foggers available for this purpose. It is recommended that any products you use contain both adult killing compounds and growth regulators to obtain the best results.

It is extremely important to follow the directions for the products you choose in order to get maximum benefit and safety for you and your pet. Each situation is different and should be tailored to your home and your pets. Your veterinarian will be glad to help you find the best treatment to help your pets win the battle against fleas and ticks.