

CLIENT FLEA AND TICK INFORMATION SHEET

Fleas and ticks are external parasites that can live on your pets and cause significant harm. Dogs and cats provide an ideal environment for these parasites. While fleas and Ticks can cause a range of health issues, they are easily preventable and treatable with proper care. This handout will serve as an informational piece only and is not intended to replace an exam by a qualified veterinarian.

Here are some frequently asked questions:



How does my Pet get Fleas and Ticks?

Fleas and ticks are transmitted through environmental exposure. They are commonly found in tall grasses, on farms, in wooded areas, and at dog parks—but can be picked up virtually anywhere outdoors. Your pet provides an ideal habitat for fleas and ticks because they feed on blood and tend to settle in hard-to-reach areas, such as the back or the base of the tail.

Once a pet brings fleas indoors, they can infest homes with either carpet or hardwood flooring. Without proper treatment, fleas can survive year-round in the home, as the indoor temperature creates an ideal environment for breeding.

Fleas are insects and follow a four-stage life cycle: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Flea eggs make up approximately 50% of the total flea population. Because eggs are the most numerous stage, environmental treatment is critical for eliminating a flea infestation. Fleas and ticks parasitize dogs and cats at similar rates and with equal severity.



How do I know my Pet has Fleas or Ticks?

Fleas and ticks cause severe skin irritation. Common signs include hair loss, scabbing, and intense itching—especially around the back and tail. In cats, these symptoms may also appear on the neck and belly, in addition to the back and tail. Fleas are small, black or brown insects, so it's helpful to check for them if you suspect your pet may be infested.

Ticks typically cause a welt at the bite site, which can vary in size depending on your pet's immune response. Ticks are arachnids and can differ in size and color depending on how long they've been attached.

In addition to skin irritation, fleas can transmit diseases such as tapeworms, *Mycoplasma*, and *Yersinia pestis* (the bacteria responsible for the Black Plague). Ticks are known to transmit several serious illnesses, including Ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and Lyme disease.



How are Fleas and Ticks Prevented/Treated?

When treating fleas in a veterinary clinic, the first step is to administer medication that kills the fleas currently living on your pet. Treatment also addresses any dermatitis (skin irritation) and secondary infections, which may require antibiotics and anti-itch medications. It is also important to eliminate fleas from your pet's home environment. In some cases, professional pest control services may be needed to fully eradicate the infestation.

For tick infestations, treatment involves removing as many ticks as possible, testing for tick-borne diseases, and starting a preventive immediately to kill any remaining ticks. While some ticks can be removed safely at home, it is sometimes necessary to have this done in a veterinary clinic. Removing ticks with bare hands is not recommended, as tick-borne diseases can pose a risk to human health.

There are many topical and oral preventive medications available to protect your pets from fleas and ticks. These are typically administered monthly or several times a year. Over-the-counter flea and tick products can sometimes be toxic or ineffective. Therefore, it is important to consult your veterinarian to determine the best prevention option for your pet.

Flea Population Pyramid

Adult fleas only account for roughly **5%** of the total flea population, while **95%** of fleas live in the pet's environment in immature life stages.

