

Fleas

Information & Treatment Advice

Why are fleas a pest?

Adult fleas live exclusively as parasites of warm-blooded animals, and are linked to specific hosts like cats and dogs. Cat fleas are believed to be responsible for 75% of all flea infestations. Cat and dog fleas will feed from humans, but usually this occurs when there are no animals around as humans are not their first choice.

They are instantly recognisable by their extremely long hind legs and flattened shape. This allows them to move quickly through hairs and a flea can also jump up to 20cm. Infestations can spread quickly especially as a female can lay up to 50 eggs a day and up to 2000 eggs in their lifetime. Most eggs will fall off the pet and hatch wherever they are in the house, usually this occurs where the pet sleeps. Only a small number of the flea population in a house will be on the animal at a given time.

Flea eggs can lay dormant for long periods of time but will be stimulated by vibration and heat.. This is why people can experience flea bites when they move in to a property that has been vacant for some time.

Life cycle

The flea lays eggs which are approximately 0.5 mm long, pearly white, oval and slightly sticky and generally found on the hair, bedding or clothing of the host. The threadlike larvae (1.5 mm) hatch in approximately a week and thrive in dark humid places. After 2-3 weeks they grow to 5mm long and spin their cocoons for pupation. Fleas formed in cocoons may 'overwinter' at this stage but emerge by the stimulation of vibration and heat, usually of the host. This is why attacks sometimes take place when a property has been left empty and a new occupier moves in. When this happens an adult flea will emerge and seek food (often your ankle). However in favourable conditions the life cycle is normally completed in 4 weeks.

Signs of fleas

Signs of fleas are very distinctive. If you have an infestation of fleas you may have some of the following problems:

- Flea bites - these will be swollen and itchy, with a single puncture point at the centre. Bite are usually found where clothes are in close contact with the body e.g. ankles. Bites often appear in clusters or lines of two bites, and can remain itchy and inflamed for up to several weeks.
- Scratching pets - pets scratching more than usual
- Sightings of fleas - you may actually see fleas in your home, on yourself or on your pets. Fleas are visible to the naked eye and are reddish in colour.

How to prevent an infestation

Following the below tips can help prevent you getting fleas in your home:

- Ensure pets are regularly treated for fleas. A vet should be consulted for the correct treatment for your animal
- Vacuum living areas including furniture on a regular basis.
- Regularly vacuum areas where any animals sleep (disposing of the bag/ contents into an outside bin)
- Wash bedding and animal bedding in a hot wash regularly

Why you may have fleas and not have an animal

- In the summer months fleas can survive outside and be carried into the house.
- Visitors may have animals and transport fleas into your home.
- You can visit other people with animals and transport fleas back to your house.
- If you have recently moved into a property, you could inherit a flea problem from the previous occupier.

Dealing with fleas

If Watford Council treats your premises the floors of your property will be covered by a layer of insecticide, it is odourless and invisible. It has a very good residual effect, which means that it will continue to work for some time if left undisturbed. Adult fleas will be killed within a few days but the floor should not be vacuumed, swept or washed if possible for 7-10 days after treatment.

As the eggs hatch and develop, you might find fleas reappearing 7-10 days after treatment. This is quite normal and provided the insecticide remains in place, it will kill the adults as they emerge. If you have a cat or dog at the premises, it should also be treated for fleas without delay using a veterinary recommended treatment. If you require further information on this, please consult your vet.

Causes of re-infestation

- Vacuuming before the 7-10 day period.
- Bringing more fleas from other premises.
- Not treating your pet or not following the product's instructions.

If you have seen signs of fleas, and you would like this treated then you should contact Watford Council on 01923 226400.