



THE VETERINARY SURGERY

Yarrambat & North Warrandyte

Fleas

In the last few years we have noticed a resurgence of fleas in the local area. This is probably due to a number of reasons – an increase in temperature and humidity, residential development increasing the density of pets and a reduction in effectiveness of some commonly used flea products.

Fleas are a source of great discomfort for pets, causing itching and they can also spread parasites and disease. In pets that are allergic to fleas, a relatively common problem we call flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), the reaction can be so severe that pets scratch themselves until they develop bald patches or bleeding sores.

It can be difficult to detect whether your pet has fleas or not. They are small and fast so can be hard to find in a thick coat. Pets with FAD may be very itchy even though they have very small numbers of fleas. The best place to check for fleas is near the base of the tail and it is often easier finding 'flea dirt' (dark flecks deep in the coat) than the fleas themselves. Flea combs can assist in checking the coat for evidence of fleas.

To know how to best treat a flea infestation it is important to understand the life cycle of the flea. An adult female flea will be laying dozens of eggs each day and potentially thousands over a lifetime. On the ground, the egg will hatch into a tiny larvae which will grow into a pupae which, in turn, will hatch and jump onto a passing pet. The speed of this process can vary from a couple of weeks to several months depending on temperature and humidity. Around 95% of a flea population will be on the ground, just waiting to re-infect your pet.

The easiest way to break the flea lifestyle is by killing all of the adult fleas that jump on your pet. There are many effective products on the market – the best provide protection for a month and are available as either a tablet or a top-spot product. To effectively kill all fleas on your property these products need to be applied to EVERY pet in your household EVERY month for an extended period of time. You may also want to consider trying to reduce the number of fleas in the environment by regularly washing bedding, steam cleaning carpets or using a 'flea bomb'.

Dogs and cats that suffer from flea allergies may need some additional medication to settle down their itching and control secondary infection. If you think your pet would benefit, please book a consultation with one of our vets.

Fleas are just one of the reasons why dogs and cats may scratch or groom excessively. If you have tried treating your pet with a quality flea product and the itching is not reduced, it is worth making an appointment and bringing them down to the clinic to be checked out. Allergies and mite infestations are other potential causes of an itchy pet and require different treatments.