**Bath Veterinary Hospital**

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**Fleas, Fleas, Fleas!!!**

 The flea is the number one parasite of our pets’ skin. A flea infestation can also lead to more severe conditions such as blood loss, skin infections and tapeworms. The eradication of fleas from your home has, fortunately, been made easier through the development of new products.

 It is helpful to understand the life cycle of the flea. One female flea can lay thousands of eggs during her lifetime. Eggs are laid on and off the host. Eggs mature into larvae, which feed on organic debris (including flea feces). After a few days they form cocoons. Their hard shells protect the growing flea from environmental conditions as well as chemicals. Fleas can lie dormant in their cocoons for up to a year. Warmth, humidity and vibration cause the cocoons to hatch and the new flea begins to look for a meal. Adult fleas can live up to 2 years.

 When dealing with fleas it may be helpful to decide how severe an infestation you are dealing with. Ask us for help in deciding which measures you may need to take to get the situation under control.

**[ ] Prevention to mild flea infestation in a one or two pet household:**

 A monthly topical product from your veterinarian may be all that is needed. Most of them kill the fleas before they have a chance to bite. Begin using these products in the spring and continue monthly until November.

**[ ] Moderate flea infestation or a multi-pet household:**

 Start with a product that will kill fleas on your pets. There are oral medications that work within minutes to kill the existing fleas on the animal. You can follow that up with a good shampooing that will remove flea debris from your pet’s skin. Bathing should be followed by an application of the monthly topical medication. Sprays or powders are also effective but require frequent use for best results. The buildup of residues from these products can be messy and the continued reapplication is time consuming.

 The second and equally important part of flea control lies in treating the house and the pets’ living area. Talk with our staff about the different products available. Indoors or in heated kennels, flea control can be a year round process. Spot treat highly susceptible areas including pet beds, napping places and high traffic areas for pets. Any product being applied to the house should also have an insect growth regulator to control the immature and egg stages of fleas. A second application of a household product is required about 2 - 3 weeks later. These are necessary to kill the cocoon stage as it matures and becomes susceptible to chemicals.

**[ ] Severe flea infestation or treatment of a pet with a secondary skin problem:**

 Treating either of these difficult problems requires dedication. Treat the affected pet(s) aggressively with medications to alleviate the skin infection and allergy symptoms and, most importantly, flea control products to eliminate the source of the allergy. Some animals may need continuous medications to control allergy symptoms. Others require only intensive therapy during flair-ups. Treatment always requires eliminating the fleas and maintaining a flea prevention program. A monthly topical preventive from your veterinarian may be the single most effective product for dogs and cats that are allergic to fleas.

 Don’t neglect the house and yard. Reapplication of house sprays may be necessary from time to time. Flea larvae prefer dark places such as under furniture and beds and behind doors. These areas may need extra attention. Outdoors, concentrate on sleeping areas, kennels and moist, shady places.

 We understand that a pet that is constantly scratching is a frustrating and discouraging problem. We are prepared to help you in many ways. Many medications are available for relief for your pet. Most flea products have guarantees and toll-free telephone numbers for a consultation with an expert on flea control. We can also recommend professional exterminators for your home.

 Patience is necessary to find the right treatment or combination of products for your special friend(s). Once a suitable treatment is found, don’t stop as soon as your pet seems better. Give all medications until they are gone and then ask for refills when necessary. Use flea control products faithfully on all pets during warm weather.

**We want you to win the war against fleas!!**