



## Flea Fact Sheet

### **What are fleas?**

Fleas are small, dark colored, flightless insects that get around by jumping from place to place. Their bodies are flattened allowing them to withstand large amounts of pressure. The adults feed on blood from the host, consuming up to 15 times their body weight in blood per day. They reproduce quickly, especially if you have pets in the house. They are almost impossible to get rid of without a pesticide treatment.

### **How are people exposed to Fleas?**

People are commonly exposed to fleas from domestic dogs and cats. Pets acquire fleas from various sources such as kennels, stray animals such as wildlife (especially opossums and raccoons), or even while wandering through the yard. Fleas can also become attached to people while they are outdoors.

### **What human diseases are fleas responsible for?**

It is possible to contract diseases from fleas, though chances are small. According to the CDC, the number of illnesses caused by flea bites tripled between 2004 and 2016. Fleas are identified as carriers of rickettsial bacterium, responsible for such diseases as the Plague and cat scratch disease. Fleas are also capable of transmitting tapeworms and bacterial infections. The feces

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from the flea contaminates the bite site or other fresh skin wounds located within range. Occasionally, infection can occur when dried infected flea feces are inhaled.

### **How to identify flea bites?**

Several common symptoms occur after being bitten by fleas. They are itchy and the skin around each bite may become sore or painful. Bites appear to be small red bumps in clusters of three or four or even in a straight line. The bumps remain small unlike mosquito bites. You may notice a red “halo,” around the bite. The bite has an even greater potential of becoming infected when excessively scratched. Infected bite sites will turn red, warm, and may release pus.

### **How to identify flea infestation?**

Common indications of a flea infestation include pets that are repeatedly scratching themselves, bite marks found on various places on your body that are red and itchy, or flea feces which resembles dirt or ground black pepper seen in beds, carpets, rugs, and other areas where the host rest. Adult fleas are also easy to see with the naked eye on the host body. If early signs of fleas are ignored, infestations can quickly spiral out of control.

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### How to control flea infestation?

Knowing the flea's life cycle is critical to successful management of flea. Within minutes of attaching to a host, fleas begin to feed. Mating and subsequent egg laying occurs within 24 hours. Adult females begin laying eggs within 48 hours of the first feed. Control measures should focus on where the fleas are found and where they are suspected to be. Successful flea control includes not only the treatment of infested pets, but also thorough treatment of all areas where flea breeding is thought to be occurring. Infected pets should be treated with prescription or over-the-counter treatments. The benefits of vacuuming cannot be overemphasized as a means of flea control. Vacuuming picks up all stages of fleas, directly reducing the population. Eliminating outdoor flea habitats and outdoor hosts are essential in flea control.

*For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health Department  
(405) 425-4437*

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