

Flea Allergies



What are fleas?

Fleas are small, dark brown, jumping insects that feed on blood by biting mammals (including people). There are many species of fleas affecting many mammals; however the cat flea is the species most commonly seen in dogs and cats that also bite humans. Adult fleas only make up about five percent of the flea population; this is because there are several life stages that fleas go through before reaching adulthood including egg, larva, and pupa. So for every adult flea in your home, several more are on their way to becoming adults and a nuisance to your pet!

What is flea allergy?

First, an allergy is a disease in which the immune system (the body's protection system) reacts excessively to substances such as fleas, pollens, mold spores, mites, and certain foods. When a flea bites your pet it passes saliva into your pet's skin, to which some pets have an allergic reaction. Flea allergy is also called flea bite hypersensitivity. On average, a female flea bites 50 times per day.

What are the signs of flea allergy?

Fleas, flea dirt (partially digested blood left behind by adult fleas) and itching in various regions of the body!!! Flea allergy is very unpleasant and causes your pet to itch, itch, which can lead to:

- Intense scratching, biting, and chewing at the skin
- Excessive grooming/licking

Hair thinning or loss (especially at the base of the tail, middle of the back and on the abdomen) This excessive itching can lead to a skin condition known as flea allergy dermatitis which is one of the most common allergic skin disorder in pets. This condition can cause "hot spots" which are usually circular, red, oozing, and very painful skin sores that commonly become infected. Crusts, abrasions and pimple-like bumps can also be symptoms flea allergy.

Is my pet at risk for flea allergies?

Yes—although the average age for the development of flea allergy is three to five years, any pet is at risk at any time of year. Outdoor flea populations usually peak during the summer months, fleas can be a year-round problem inside your home since the temperature is constant. Even intermittent flea exposure can lead to flea allergy dermatitis. Any pet that walks through an area that another animal has passed is at risk or acquiring a hungry, newly developed flea.

How will the doctor treat my pet for flea allergy?

A thorough physical exam is the first step in diagnosing a flea allergy. The doctor will look for signs of fleas, and/or flea dirt, scratching, skin sores and/or hair loss. Since flea allergy symptoms can mimic other disorders of the skin, the doctor may need to perform some tests to rule out other conditions. There are many medications to treat fleas, help soothe the scratching and any additional skin disorders your pet may be experiencing. In addition to medications, your Banfield doctor may also recommend a specific diet or supplements to help relieve the skin irritation and help the skin heal. It is important that your pet use all the medications your doctor prescribes to get full relief from this irritating condition.

Can flea allergy be prevented?

The best way to fight flea allergy is to eliminate the fleas! Topical monthly flea treatment such as FirstShield™ Trio (for dogs only), FirstShield™ for Cats and Kittens, and Comfortis® (for dogs only) will help to keep your pet flea and itch free. There are several other types of flea prevention available that work in different ways. Ask your Banfield team for more information about these products to ensure that your pet is being treated with the most appropriate prevention. It is important to use these flea control products routinely (follow label directions for dosing intervals). Continuous use is needed to prevent your pet from becoming re-infested. Your doctor may also recommend additional flea control measures for your home or yard.

Cleaning your home is a part of treating for fleas

- Wash all the pet's bedding in hot soapy water.
- Clean ALL surfaces where your pets spend time.
- Vacuum carpets, rugs and sofa cushions thoroughly and often, including all corners and crevices.
- Dispose of the vacuum cleaner bag after each cleaning session in an outside trash can.
- Several indoor pesticides are available that can also help eliminate fleas in your home. Be sure to carefully read and follow the information on these pesticides to ensure all of your family is safe when using a chemical of any kind. As always, if you have any questions or concerns about the health of your pet, please contact your Banfield doctor.

For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

