

FLEAS

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[Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of information. However, this is not a substitute for prompt veterinary care. Any similarity to other publications is unintentional. Published online at Sealyhealthguard.org, 11/23/10]

In springtime as the pretty days appear and trees bloom out, we realize that along with the nice warm weather come fleas! There are a lot of convenient new products out there to choose from; it can be confusing. There are many "spot-on" products, that are applied between the shoulder blades, natural remedies and even tablets. Here's a quick comparison of methods. The first three discussed here are the "spot-on" products.

Frontline Topspot claims to be the #1 flea treatment recommended by vets. It kills up to 100% of fleas within 18 hours after application, ticks within 48 hours. It claims to last longer than the #2 product (Advantage) in a head-to-toe test. It is supposed to be waterproof and safe for puppies and pregnant or nursing mothers. The company says the product spreads by translocation, dispersed by the pet's natural oils, collecting in oil glands then wicked onto the hair over thirty days. There is also Frontline Plus, which has an added ingredient that kills flea eggs, flea larvae and all stages of four major ticks. There is also a Frontline spray which can be applied by a vet in cases of sudden, heavy infestation.

Advantage by Bayer stops biting fleas in 3-5 days and starts to kill adult fleas within 1 hour after application. Within 12 hours, 90-100% of adult fleas are dead. It also kills flea larvae. The company says not to let the pet lick itself or other pets for 30 minutes after application. Ingestion can cause depression, salivation, dilated pupils, uncoordination, panting, muscle tremors. Children should not touch the dog for 2 hours.

K9 Advantix, also by Bayer, repels and kills ticks and mosquitoes and all stages of fleas.

Revolution kills ticks, all stages of fleas and also prevents heartworm.

Sentinel does all this plus prevents hookworms, roundworms and whipworms. It also claims to treat and control ear mites and sarcoptic mange. This product enters the bloodstream through the skin.

Program is a tablet given once a month that prevents flea larvae from hatching. It does not kill adult fleas.

Capstar is a tablet that is intended to be given prior to probable exposure to fleas. It is effective for 24 hours and kills 90 percent of adult fleas within 30 minutes. It does not affect eggs or larvae.

At Drs. Foster and Smith, there is an electronic flea repellent collar tag that is said to repel fleas and ticks- using an ultrasonic pulse. It uses a battery that lasts 1 year, and is waterproof. On the website, there are some very convincing testimonials.

In addition, there are flea dips for sudden infestations, and shampoos. The "oldfashioned" way to control pests is by treating the pet and the environment. You can treat the environment with frequent vacuuming and laundering the pet's bedding, keeping grass watered and mowed, releasing beneficial nematodes (worms which kill and eat fleas) into the yard, and use of agricultural lime or natural unrefined (not pool filter-grade) diatomaceous earth, which gets between the flea's exoskeleton and kills it with friction. Be careful not to use this where the dog could inhale it. You can treat your dog with brewer's yeast and garlic, use topical agents derived from citrus-based plants, and use a flea comb, killing the fleas you catch in a container of soapy water.

There has been concern that fleas are beginning to become resistant to the active ingredients in the topical flea products. Questions are arising about the safety of these chemicals for our pets and for us. "Whole Dog Journal" recently contained an article questioning the safety of the active ingredients, stating that some of them may be carcinogenic, cause organ damage, and can have reproductive effects, such as decreased fertility, decreased litter size, and fetus mortality.

Permethrin has caused changes in bone marrow. Dr. Theresa Garden of Animal Health and Healing states that permethrin is extremely toxic to cats and should not be used on dogs in households containing cats.

The "Journal" also stated that companies are not required to disclose the inert or inactive ingredients in their formulations. The toxicology tests required for these inert ingredients are less rigorous than for the active components. Some of these inert ingredients have already been linked to cancer, anemia and fetal damage. Pets with existing health problems or who are older or immunocompromised are more at risk for complications from flea treatments.

It's up to you to decide how much of a problem fleas are in your environment and how much protection you think your dog needs.

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