



MUD BAY

DOGS WITH FLEA ALLERGY DERMATITIS OR FLEA INFESTATIONS

Katy Patterson-Miller, DVM, Director of Dog & Cat Health & Nutrition

THE ISSUE

Flea allergy dermatitis (FAD) and flea infestations can cause intense itching and discomfort for your dog. FAD is a common allergic reaction that can last for up to two weeks after a flea bite. Due to the severe, prolonged allergic reaction caused by FAD, many dog owners decide that a dog's severe reaction to flea bites outweighs the potentially negative impacts of pesticide-containing flea treatments. Routinely applying flea treatments to all pets in a household protects the health and comfort of dogs with FAD.

Fleas are biting parasites that can also transmit tapeworms and other infectious diseases. The cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felix*, is the most common flea found in the United States. The adult flea feeds on the blood of cats, dogs and other mammals. Only 5% of the flea life cycle, the adult phase, is visible to the naked eye. Flea eggs, larvae and pupae may infest your home without your knowledge. Adult female fleas can lay up to 50 eggs per day, and those eggs transfer to carpet, bedding, soil and other surfaces. The complete life cycle of the flea may last anywhere from two weeks to two years, so year-round prevention efforts are necessary.

The typically mild winters in the Western US allows fleas to thrive. It takes a temperature below 37°F for ten days with full frost penetration to kill fleas in all life stages. Any area that is warmer, such as a garage or under a porch, can protect dormant fleas from death. Thus, mild winters lead to pronounced spring and summer flea seasons.

Preventing flea infestations with natural approaches to maintain a comfortable home is ideal. But natural remedies may not resolve some serious flea infestations, and they don't do enough to protect dogs with FAD. Under these circumstances, you may want to consider veterinarian-prescribed topical flea treatments or chemical pesticides. These flea products provide high-impact approaches that may negatively impact the long-term health of dogs, humans and the environment with heavy, repeated use. However, they can be an essential part of controlling flea infestations or preventing allergic reactions when used on an as-needed basis.

WARNING FOR DOG OWNERS WHO ALSO CARE FOR CATS

Cats are very sensitive to many of the chemical and natural ingredients used in flea killers and flea repellents. Never use a flea product—chemical or natural—on a cat unless it is specifically labeled for use on cats.

WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

See your veterinarian if your house has a severe infestation that doesn't improve after four weeks of using several alternative flea treatments. If your dog has significant hair loss, bleeding or smelly skin, please don't wait, and visit your veterinarian. If your dog (or cat) begins to vomit, drool heavily, twitch or shake, immediately call your veterinarian and remove any flea product on your dog's skin with Dawn dish detergent.

THE SOLUTION

1 Choose the appropriate pesticide.

Be on the lookout for counterfeit flea preventatives when shopping online discount stores. Buying from your veterinarian is safest, but if you do buy online, choose a reputable source and check for signs of counterfeiting. Counterfeit flea products may not have childproof packaging, an EPA registration number or English directions. The package may include misspellings, a foreign label, or a mismatch between the pictured animal and the product within. Contact the EPA if you think you might have a counterfeit product.

- **Veterinary products** Consulting with your veterinarian allows you to work with your veterinarian to get the best possible solution for your individual dog. You'll also avoid buying a counterfeit product.
- **Over-the-counter products** Talk to your veterinarian before using any pesticide-based flea products unless you have a healthy, middle-aged adult dog. While our recommendations are based on safety studies and product availability, your veterinarian may recommend other products that better match your dog's needs. Veterinarian recommendations are particularly important for dogs with health problems, dogs who take medication, senior dogs, young dogs and puppies.

Mud Bay and its staff strive to help dog and cat owners improve the health of their animals and to increase the happiness owners experience in caring for their animals by providing natural foods, well-made supplies and useful information. Mud Bay and its staff do not diagnose or treat specific conditions, and the information provided by Mud Bay's staff, publications, website and other media are not substitutes for treatment by a veterinarian.

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- **Fipronil or fipronil and s-methoprene** products are available in a spot-on liquid that kills fleas and ticks. Products that contain these active ingredients are waterproof after three days. Wait to apply them at least 24 hours after a bath. Most canines can use these products unless you bathe them more than every seven days. Currently, these are the only products that can be safely used on your dog if she is pregnant or lactating. Dogs as young as eight weeks old can also use these products. Fipronil or fipronil and s-methoprene are the active ingredients in Frontline and Frontline Plus.
- **Nitenpyram** is an oral tablet and best used if you bathe your dog at least once a week. While this is an over-the-counter option that is very safe and can be used in animals as young as four weeks (over 2 lbs.), it is only effective for 24 hours. These products are not as effective at helping an animal with FAD or flea infestation. They are best used before bringing a pet home after boarding, before introducing a new animal into the house, or immediately after exposure to fleas but before they are brought into your home environment. If you prefer tablets over spot-on liquids, talk to your veterinarian about a similar but longer-acting oral medication for regular use.

2 Eliminate and repel fleas from your dog (and treat all animals at the same time when possible).

- **Apply the pesticide.** Always follow the manufacturer's directions to ensure correct application (different products may have completely different instructions.)
- **Watch** your dog. If you see weakness, shakiness or any other unusual behavior, call your veterinarian.

3 Naturally eliminate and repel fleas from your home.

- **Vacuum your house frequently.** Vacuuming eliminates fleas in every stage of their life, and it eliminates larvae food sources. Vacuum every few days, paying particular attention to the places your dog spends the most time. Add a grocery-store chemical flea collar to your vacuum cleaner's bag to kill trapped fleas or empty your vacuum's bag or container immediately after vacuuming.
- **Wash and dry bedding, clothing, and toys.** Soap and water drown adult fleas, and a dryer's high heat kills fleas in all life stages. Spray washed bedding and dog clothing with the natural repellent you use on your dog.

4 Strengthen your dog's skin.

By helping your dog's skin and coat become as strong and as healthy as possible, you'll make your dog a less attractive host for fleas and reduce the secondary problems caused by fleas and flea bites.

- ***Switch to a diet specifically designed to strengthen skin and coat.** Raw diets are an especially good choice for improving skin and coat health. If you would like to know if raw food is a good fit for your dog, talk to a Muddy about our decision tool *Can Your Dog Benefit from Raw Foods?*
- ***Supplement with digestive enzymes** to help your dog get the best possible results from his diet. Look for products with protease, amylase, cellulase, or lipase.
- ***Essential fatty acid supplements** support healthy skin and coat as well as overall health. Consider adding salmon oil, pollock oil, or another Omega-3 heavy supplement to your dog's diet.

RESULTS

Expect improvement within 48 hours of treating your dog and house, but it can take up to six to eight weeks to resolve an infestation. After two months, if you haven't eliminated the problem, consult your veterinarian for alternative recommendations. When the flea infestation is under control, you may be able to switch back to using only natural, preventative treatments.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Please be careful when using flea products. The artificial—and even some of the natural—ingredients used to kill and repel fleas can permanently injure or even kill some animals. Cats are particularly susceptible. If you have any doubts about whether something is safe, we recommend you talk with your veterinarian before using it.
- Dogs getting routine pesticide flea treatments are still likely to benefit from many of the preventative measures outlined in our solution sheet *Natural Flea Prevention for Dogs*.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

Mud Bay staffers are specifically trained to help dog owners with fleas. Muddies can also help you find the products that match the recommendations on this sheet, so if you need more help or information, please let us know.

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