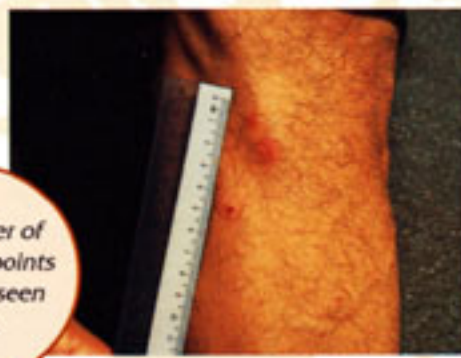


Getting To Know ... Cat Fleas



Why do we often get 3 little cat flea bites in a row?

The presence of several little bites in a row indicates that the person has been bitten by a flea that is accustomed to another host species, the cat. Finding the first bite on you distasteful (no insult meant!), it has tried again, and perhaps again.



The cluster of puncture points is clearly seen here.

The cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felis*, belongs to the Insect Order Siphonaptera (meaning having a tube and is wingless). It develops through a complete metamorphosis, taking between 2 weeks and a year to go from egg to adult, the duration of which is dependent on the food available and temperature. The adult can live for 2 years or more.

The flea's pearly white egg is difficult to find with our naked eyes. It may or may not be deposited on the cat, but ultimately it typically falls into the resting-place of the host. The egg hatches after 2 to 10 days with the larva emerging as a white, eyeless, active worm. After 3 larval stages (instars) taking between 1 to 2 weeks, the flea spins a silky cocoon and



ADULT

transforms into a pupa before developing into an adult.

The adult can remain in a pupal cocoon for up to a year and immediately exits to bite when it detects the presence of a potential host (e.g. vibrations caused by movement, carbon dioxide from breathing and body heat). This emergence, especially in vacant homes and warehouses, baffles many people because without the presence of any cat, the flea appears magically from out of nowhere.

The brownish-black adult has a laterally compressed body that facilitates gliding between hairs and carpet fibres. Its strong leg muscles enable it to leap great distances. Although the length of its legs measures less than 1 mm each, it can high jump nearly 200 mm. In theory this means that if the flea were enlarged to the size of a man, it would be able to high jump 135 metres, or the height of a 45-storey building in Singapore!

Both the male and female flea suck blood. Although they prefer cats, they are not host-specific and will bite Man for a good blood meal.

The cat flea bite is itchier compared to that of the mosquito, and it lasts longer! The bite forms a small, hard, red, slightly raised itching spot and bleeding may occur. The centre of the spot is marked by a single puncture point, which on closer examination is paler and flesh coloured. This is where the flea had injected its saliva containing an anti-blood clotting substance (an anticoagulant), which persists for as long as 10 days, causing great discomfort.



EGG

To add to your agony, the cat flea prefers to bite the "hot spots" around your ankles, lower legs, the waist and the inside of the elbow, which is irritating because these locations are too inconvenient or undignified to scratch!

The cat flea does not transmit the plague, which its cousin the Oriental rat flea, *Xenopsylla cheopis*, is infamous for. Although the cat flea is better known for its itchy bites, its danger to humans lies in its role as a vector of tapeworm infection caused by the endoparasite *Dipylidium caninum*. Children playing with infested cats may accidentally swallow the tapeworm eggs either from contaminated food or water directly from faecal-contaminated fingers or from infected fleas.

Tapeworm infection normally produces minor physical discomforts like anaemia (i.e. paleness and fatigue), abdominal pain, nausea or diarrhoea. The more serious effect is the knowledge that the worms are in the intestines, resulting in worry and queasiness.

The effective elimination of cat fleas calls for a combination of sanitation, housekeeping and chemical treatment, including sending the pet to be treated by the veterinarian on the same day that service against the infestation is carried out. The presence of stray cats should be discouraged. Repeat chemical treatment 1 week later ensures complete elimination.



Fresh cat flea bites, as they start to itch!

Diagram of the Life Cycle of the cat flea



PUPA (Cocoon)



LARVA

If you need any help in the control of cat fleas, please contact Aardwolf Pestkare (Tel: 2681771 for our 24-hour service). Our Surveyors will be very happy to advise you.