



University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute
Center for Environmental Oncology

Fleeing from Fleas

How to Manage Fleas Without Using Pesticides

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Highmark Healthy Places, Healthy People

Fleas are reddish brown to black, wingless external parasites that are generally found on the skin of cats, dogs, and other animals. Although fleas prefer domesticated animals, when supply is short, fleas will bite humans or other animals.

Symptoms of flea bites

- Bites itch and appear as a central red spot surrounded by a red halo.
- Some people may have an allergic reaction to the bite.
- Some cat fleas are suspected of transmitting murine typhus to humans.

How to manage fleas without using pesticides*

- Thoroughly clean pet beds and resting areas both indoors and outdoors in hot soapy water.
- Thoroughly and regularly vacuum floors, rugs, carpets, upholstered furniture, and crevices to remove flea eggs and larvae.
- Place vacuum bags in a sealed bag and throw out since flea eggs and larvae can survive inside the bags.
- Use a special comb to remove fleas from your pet, and comb at regular intervals to reduce occurrence of fleas.
- Spray your pet daily with a 50/50 mixture of white vinegar and water.
- Use an enzyme shampoo on your pet.
- Mix brewer's yeast, or vitamin B or garlic tablets in with pet food.
- Rub animal's coat with fennel, rue, and rosemary.
- Place eucalyptus seeds and leaves where the animal sleeps.

*As a last resort and after consulting with a veterinarian, use a topical liquid spot treatment other than fipronil, which is recognized as a carcinogen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Topical liquid treatments are preferable to sprays or powders, where overspray and residues become airborne.