

Fleas, ticks and your pets



Ticks and fleas are a problem in the NT as they love a warm, damp climate. Infestations can be difficult to control - what you see on your pet is only a very small percentage of the flea or tick population in your house and garden.

Some signs that your pet may have fleas include:

- Scratching, biting and hair loss, especially at the base of the tail and rump
- You may see fleas (especially over the rump and in the groin region)
- You may find evidence of “flea dirt” (flea faeces)
It can sometimes be difficult to find the fleas, but it is relatively easy to check for flea dirt (faeces). Simply moisten a cotton ball, part your pet’s fur and place the cotton ball on the skin over the rump. If the cotton ball takes on black specs surrounded by a reddish area, this may be flea dirt and can indicate that your pet has fleas.

Fleas will tend to jump onto your pet only to feed and then jump off again. Dogs and cats can have a reaction to flea saliva resulting in a skin condition called Flea Allergy Dermatitis or FAD, resulting in severe irritation and infections. Treatment of FAD can be complicated and veterinary consultation is recommended. Severe infestations of fleas can cause anaemia, requiring blood transfusions.

Ticks and your dog...

Luckily we don't have the potentially fatal Paralysis Tick (*Ixodes holocyclus*) in Darwin. We do however have the **Brown Dog Tick** which can infest dogs in very high numbers and cause **irritation, anaemia and Tick Fever**. If an infestation is not addressed early, their populations can develop into hundreds or even thousands on one dog and cause severe illness even death due to blood loss.

The Brown Dog Tick really only likes to feed off dogs but will bite a human or other mammal if in proximity. There are several life stages of this parasite; nymphs, larva, male and female ticks which each appear different. The large grey bodied ticks are the females which, once fed, will fall off and lay their eggs in the environment. As these are not burrowing ticks they can be plucked off easily.

Treatments for your pets...

Only a small percentage of the adult flea and tick population actually lives on your pet. Their eggs and larvae live in the environment and can survive for up to a year, so it is important to not only treat your animal directly for fleas and ticks but also decontaminate the environment as well. Wash your pet's bedding using the hottest cycle and regularly vacuum/clean carpets, rugs and floors. It may be necessary to call a pest control company to professionally treat your house and yard. We do not recommend flea or tick collars or shampoos alone as they fail to address the environmental flea infestation.

Several over the counter products are registered for tick and flea control including monthly tablets, collars, rinses, top-spots and sprays.

Warning: Some non-veterinary brands of flea treatments for dogs are potentially lethal when applied to cats. Always seek veterinary advice about the best flea treatments for your pet.

If you have any further questions about fleas and ticks and how best to care for your furry family members, the vets and nurses at University Avenue Vet Hospital are here to help – just call us on 8931 0455.