



Miramonte Veterinary Hospital

1766 Miramonte Avenue, Mountain View, CA 94040 (650) 962-8338 Fax (650) 962-8496

Fleas: Your pet's itching to get rid of them

Kenton Taylor, D.V.M.

Dealing with a flea problem is often one of the most important and pressing things that people want to do for their pets and themselves. Historically, this has meant using liberal amounts of various insecticides on your pet, home, and yard. Thankfully times have changed and effective flea control has never been easier or safer.

Fleas are small, brown, wingless insects, which feed on blood from dogs, cats, and humans. A single pair of fleas can produce more than six thousand eggs in just four weeks. The eggs hatch into larvae, which feed on organic matter in the environment and then spin a remarkably strong protective cocoon. In as little as sixteen days from being a newly laid egg, the adult flea emerges from the cocoon. For every adult flea on your dog or cat there are 100-200 immature fleas in various stages in your house and/or yard. Fleas can also carry tapeworm eggs that when ingested by your pet, release the eggs, which infect your pet.

The Miramonte Flea Control Plan

Revolution® (selamectin) – This is a non-pesticide monthly spot on treatment. Besides killing fleas, Revolution® protects dogs and cats from heartworm, some ticks (on label, but not shown to be effective), and mange and ear mites. Revolution® is safe for use on puppies and kittens as young as six to eight weeks of age and bathing does not affect efficacy. For those animals that need a combination of flea and heartworm control, Revolution® is a convenient and effective choice.

Program® (lufenuron) – This is a non-insecticidal medication which effectively attacks the egg, larval, and nymph stages of flea development. Program® is given orally once a month to your pet with a small snack. The medication makes its way through the body and into the skin where it is ingested by feeding adult fleas. Over a 3-5 month period, Program® radically decreases the flea population by disrupting the formation of their external skeletons and eggshells. For cats, Program® is also available as an injection given every six months. For current patients, a veterinary nurse can administer the injection without an appointment. Program®, administered year round to all dogs and/or cats in the household is effective flea prevention. However, if immediate flea control is needed, then Advantage® or Frontline® should be used for the first three months.

Sentinel®, a combined prescription product of Program® and Interceptor® (milbemycin oxime), provides flea control with the heartworm prevention of Interceptor®. Sentinel® is recommended for dogs that do not need tick control provided by Revolution® and/or immediate flea control.

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Advantage® (imidocloprid), **Frontline®** (fipronil) and **Promeris®** (metaflumizone) – These three products are monthly spot on treatments with very effective residual activity and low toxicity concerns. A small volume of fluid is applied onto the skin and utilizes the oils on the skin to travel over the surface of the body over a 24-48 hour period. Advantage® kills adult fleas for 3-4 weeks whereas Frontline® and Promeris® are also effective against ticks. Frontline® and Promeris® remain effective after bathing and swimming while Advantage® can be bathed off. These products are best used to provide immediate relief for flea allergic animals or on animals with frequent exposure to new flea populations or ticks. Monthly use during the warm weather months is especially important, as that is when fleas are most abundant. Heartgard® and Sentinel® are recommended in addition to these products if heartworm prevention is needed as well.

Comfortis® (spinosad) – This is a new flavored chewable tablet that kills adult fleas and is only available for use in dogs. It works quickly, and lasts for one month. Since Comfortis® is taken orally, it does not wash off the skin, nor does it leave a residue. Many dog owners choose this product because it eliminates the exposure of topical insecticides to the household.

Environmental control – By following the above recommendations appropriate for your pet's flea problem no environmental insecticide use is needed (e.g. sprays, foggers, etc). Vacuuming around the house, and washing your pet's bedding will help to remove flea eggs and larvae in the environment.

Flea control safety – While this article promotes the use of safe flea control, all flea control products are potentially toxic or may produce unexpected side effects. Toxicity may result from accidental overdose or unexpected sensitivity. Known side effects, particularly to the organo-phosphate pesticides, are vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, sluggishness, weakness, or abnormal behavior. If you suspect that your animal is reacting adversely to a flea control product, stop using the product and consult your veterinarian immediately. If the reaction occurs immediately after application, the product should be rinsed off thoroughly, and the animal brought to the veterinarian for evaluation. Adverse reactions may occur from minutes to days following application. Insecticides can be toxic to people: all products should be handled carefully, avoiding direct contact as much as possible. Keep all products out of the reach of children and please read all packaging materials fully.

Flea control is becoming easier and safer. Your veterinarian can assist you in selecting those flea control measures appropriate for your pet's environment and level of flea infestation.