

VECTOR CONTROL BRANCH
Hawaii Department of Health

FLEAS

There are nine species of fleas in Hawaii, but only one, the cat flea, is a major nuisance to householders. Despite its name, the cat flea also infests dogs. Flea bites are considered only as irritants today, but in the past, they were feared for their ability to transmit plague. Plague is no longer present in Hawaii but one should still be wary of bites from fleas that infest rats because they are capable of transmitting murine typhus.

CAUSE OF FLEA PROBLEMS

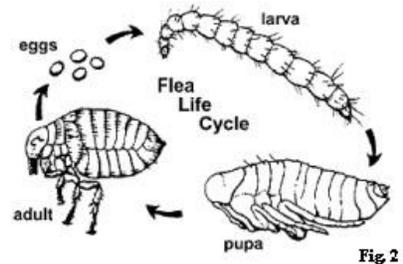
Most pet owners are unaware of fleas on their premises because most fleas prefer the blood of animals over people. Serious flea infestations usually occur two weeks after:

- 1) A pet dog or cat has died
- 2) A litter of pups or kittens have left their nests
- 3) Tenants with pets have moved
- 4) A tethered dog is relocated
- 5) A flea-infested dog or cat has dropped their fleas
- 6) Successfully eradicating rodents in a heavily infested building.

Starving fleas, left without a host under these conditions, migrate and begin biting everyone that they encounter.

LIFE CYCLE

Females lay 4-8 eggs after each blood meal and are able to produce several hundred eggs in a lifetime. The eggs are laid on the animal but fall off and hatch into larvae on the ground. The larvae feed on food crumbs, animal hairs, or dried flea feces. They grow over a period of a week to several months before enclosing themselves in silken cocoons covered with sand or other debris to transform into pupae. Adults may emerge from the pupae within a week or remain dormant for up to a year. Dormant pupae remain dormant until vibrations from footsteps or potential hosts or other stimuli cause the adults to emerge. Both male and female fleas feed on blood but the female requires a blood meal to produce eggs. Cat fleas are unable to survive in homes without pets because they cannot produce eggs from human blood. Most fleas leave the host after obtaining a blood meal; they do not live on the host.



CONTROL METHODS

PREVENTATIVE CONTROL

- 1) Use the following flea control methods if any of the six causes of flea problems occur. Control measures must be taken no later than a week after such

occurrences to prevent a flea outbreak. Vacuum carpets and furniture to remove as many eggs, larvae, pupae and adult fleas as possible before applying an aerosol insecticide labels for flea control. Flea infested lawns and soil under crawl spaces should be watered before applying a properly diluted insecticide concentrate labeled for flea control. Watering increases penetration of insecticides below the soil surface where fleas hide. Treatments should be particularly thorough where pets sleep and rest. **DO NOT USE HYDRATED LIME FOR FLEA CONTROL.** It is ineffective against fleas and will hamper future treatment by neutralizing insecticides. Use only insecticides labeled for flea control and follow directions exactly.

- 2) Inspect pets periodically for fleas. If infested, have the pet treated with an insecticide labeled specifically for flea control on pets. Premises should also be treated for fleas at the same time that pets are treated.

CAUTION: *Certain pesticides and their solvents may cause respiratory irritation. Persons with respiratory diseases should consult their physicians before using any pesticide. IT IS A VIOLATION OF FEDERAL LAW IF PESTICIDES ARE NOT APPLIED EXACTLY AS THE LABEL DIRECTS.*

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