

Published based on [Fleas, parasites and their treatments](#).

Fleas, parasites and their treatments

WHAT IS A PARASITE?

External parasites are pretty common among dogs. A parasite is an **organism that lives off the resources your dog** has to offer: namely, fresh blood (which most parasites drink) and a warm place to stay (in and on the skin and fur).

What are the common parasites that might affect my dog?

There are a wide range of parasites that affect dogs:



- Fleas
- Ticks
- Mites
- Lice

All of these **parasites cause adverse reactions in your dog:** typically, itching and inflamed skin, a dull coat, and bald spots. In advanced cases, your **dog may develop anemia** (blood loss) and become generally debilitated (particularly if he or she is very young, very old, or suffering from another condition).

In addition to this, many **parasites convey secondary and internal parasites to your dog** – for example, **fleas usually carry the common tapeworm** (which causes constipation and flatulence), and **ticks can cause a variety of much more serious problems like Lyme's disease and paralysis.**

In today's newsletter, we're going to be **looking at fleas: what they are, how to tell if your dog's affected, and how to get rid of them.**

A CLOSER LOOK AT FLEAS

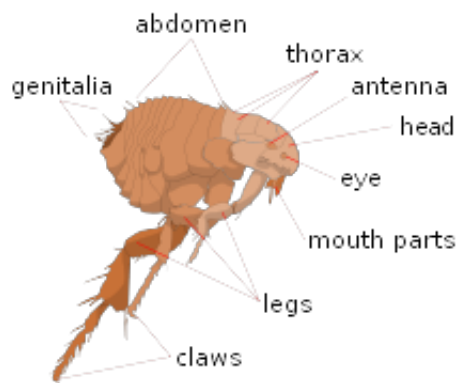


Image via [Wikipedia](#)

Fleas are without question the number-one most common external parasite affecting dogs. They're small, jumping insects that are light brown in color, although humans generally can't see them – they move much too quickly for that!

Fleas live off your dog's blood. The life cycle of a flea moves very rapidly from stage one (egg) to stage four (adult flea), which means they're capable of **multiplying with staggering rapidity.**

An adult flea lays hundreds of eggs per day. Each egg will then become an **adult flea**, which lay hundreds more eggs of its own. One flea becomes a major problem very quickly!

HOW TO TELL IF YOUR DOG HAS FLEAS

The **symptoms of a flea infestation** are unmistakable.

A dog with a flea infestation will scratch almost constantly, often at areas that **fleas** seem to favor: the ears, the base of the tail, the belly, and the stifle (the webbing of soft skin between the thigh and the abdomen).

It's actually the **saliva of the flea that causes the irritation**, not the bite itself, and some **dogs have a genuine allergy to this saliva** (as opposed to a standard irritation). **Dogs with allergies suffer much more significant negative reactions to a flea infestation**, and usually develop "**hot spots**".

These hot spots are areas of sore, inflamed, flaking, bleeding, and infected skin, caused by the flea saliva and your dog's own reaction to it. Bald patches will sometimes develop too, from repeated scratching and ongoing inflammation.

If you **think your dog has fleas**, you can confirm your suspicions by taking a **closer look at his skin**: you probably won't be able to see the fleas themselves, but you should be able to see what **looks like ground pepper** (a thin sprinkling of fine black grains) on his skin. **This is flea dirt (poop).**

If you [groom him with a flea comb](#) (which is like a fine-tooth comb), try wiping it on a paper towel: if red blotches show up on the towel, **you know that your dog has fleas** (on a white background like a paper towel, flea poop shows up red: since fleas subsist on blood, their poop is colored accordingly).

TREATMENT FOR FLEAS

Because **fleas only spend a small amount of time actually on your dog**, and the rest of their time leaping

through your house laying eggs and feeding on human blood, it's not enough to just treat the dog: you also have to target his bedding, the entire house, all human bedding, and the yard (**yes, fleas lay eggs all through the yard, too. Even if it's cold outside, you're not necessarily off the hook: cold weather doesn't kill flea eggs, it just puts them into a state of hibernation. The eggs will hatch as soon as it gets warm enough outside.**)

You'll need a **broad-spectrum treatment** which kills not only the **adult fleas** (which are the ones that bite), but also any **developing fleas, and the eggs**.

PREVENTION IS THE BEST (AND THE EASIEST!)

Prevention is definitely the best cure – you should keep your **dog's flea treatments** up to date with the use of a calendar, and use a treatment that's prescribed by the vet. Off-the-shelf treatments aren't recommended, since **different dogs require different strengths depending on their size, age, and activity levels**. A particular **benefit of prescribed flea treatment** is that most are also **designed to prevent other parasites (like mites, ticks, and heartworm) from affecting your dog**.

FOR AN EXISTING INFESTATION

If your **dog already has fleas**, you have two options:

- You can **'bomb'** the house and yard with a **flea-pesticide**. These come as foggers (which coat each room, and the yard, in a fine mist of pesticide) and sprays (which are applied manually to each surface throughout the house and yard), and although they're **very effective in killing fleas and eggs**, there's one major drawback: **they're highly toxic to humans, dogs, and the environment**. Depending on your priorities, this is probably the **quickest solution to a flea problem** (and will effectively wipe out the eggs, too) but **if you have anyone in the house with allergies or a health condition – including pets! – you might want to think again**.

- A more **health-friendly alternative** is to **target the dog with a topical anti-flea solution prescribed by the vet** (like Advantage or Revolution), and to rigorously clean the house on a regular basis until the flea problem has gone. This means vacuuming each room thoroughly each day – **put a flea collar in with the vacuum bag to kill any fleas that get sucked up** – and **wash all human and dog bedding in hot water as often as you can** (once every day or every two days is recommended). You'll be able to **tell when the problem's gone** because your **dog won't be scratching, and his coat will be clear of flea dirt when you inspect it**.

WHAT NOT TO DO ABOUT FLEAS

- **Don't use multiple products on your dog** – it'll make him sick, since you'll be overloading his system with toxins.

- **Don't forget to treat all the animals in the house at the same time**: cat and dog fleas are interchangeable, and if one animal has fleas, they all will have them, even if some are not displaying the symptoms.

- **Flea collars are no longer recommended as a safe option for flea prevention, since the collars are highly toxic** – vets have realized that placing a toxic material directly against your pet's skin for long periods of time (flea collars have to be worn 24/7 to be effective) is detrimental to your [dog's health](#).

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PARASITES AND THEIR TREATMENT...

Fleas are just one of the many, many types of parasites that affect your dog. To find out more about the **complete prevention and treatment of all types of parasites** (external and internal), as well as a comprehensive guide to all aspects of dog health, take a look at The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health.

This book is an invaluable resource for the responsible dog owner, and will help you to ensure that your dog remains happy and healthy – just the way you want him to be!

You can check out the book by clicking on the link below:

[External Parasites and fleas on dogs](#)

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- [Lyme Disease in Dogs](#) (timesunion.com)
- [Fleas...be gone!](#) (atyourcervix.blogspot.com)
- [How To Check a Dog For Ticks and Remove Any You Find](#) (howcast.com)

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