

Those Pesky Fleas and Ticks

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One of the most common problems affecting dog and cat owners is the ever present infestation of ticks and fleas. These external parasites cause skin irritations and anemia and carry blood borne diseases generally referred to as "tick fevers". These latter diseases also have the additional concern in that some are zoonotic, having the potential that the parasite can also transmit disease to humans. It is therefore important that we minimize their harmful effects by reducing their presence on the pet and in the environment.



Here in Jamaica, a tropical country, there are no clear cut tick/flea seasons as can be described in the temperate zones, so this is a problem that exists year round. Since these critters have also been around for millennia we must be realistic and recognise that we can at best aim for control and not complete eradication of the problem.

Tick and flea control must be treated with a multi-modal approach which involves treatment of adult parasites present on the animal, protecting the animal from re-infestation and treatment of the environment. Since each situation is unique and ticks and fleas have different lifecycles and habits it is best to seek the assistance of your veterinarian in deciding the protocols that would best address your particular situation. However the following are some general guidelines that should be followed for an effective tick and flea control program.

1. *Identify whether your problem is ticks/fleas or both.*
2. *Know the environment of the pet to determine means of transmission and possible breeding areas e.g. Does the pet live mostly indoors or outdoors? Are there other pets in the household or in contact with your pet? How large is the roaming area allowed to your pet(s)?*
3. *Use of a safe but effective adulticide to quickly and efficiently remove the infestation from the pet(s).*
4. *Use of a safe but effective residual product to provide long term protection from re-infestation.*
5. *Treatment of the environment with a safe but effective chemical to eliminate the parasites on the premises – house or yard.*
6. *Planning a regime of repeated treatment to ensure that the parasites are kept to a minimum.*

A final reminder is that the products used for tick and flea control do have a level of toxicity to both the pet and the person (after all we are killing the critters) so it is always best to seek the advice of knowledgeable professionals and to use the products as directed.