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Dog and small animals vet



Summer is party-time and with any hot social engagement comes the risk of pesky gatecrashers—we're not talking about the human kind that turns up on your doorstep with a slab of beer. The gatecrashers we're referring to are the parasites and nasties that affect our furry friends. So Dr Adam Gordon looks at the importance of flea and tick control and treatment of Flea Allergy Dermatitis.

Dr Melissa Catt weighs in with good advice and tips to eradicate unwelcome guests in your home environment (no, not your annoying in-laws visiting from Watanobbi).

Birds are natural party animals so Dr Alex Rosenwax reminds us why we need to curb our bird's enthusiasm and keep their routine in balance. He also informs us of the dangers that the silly season can bring into our homes.

Well summer is almost here and we are all looking forward to the great things that summer brings. Beautiful weather, walking the dog in the daylight after work, trips to the beach and barbecues on balmy evenings. There are two things however, that our four legged friends don't look forward to—fleas and paralysis ticks. These little critters can cause a wide range of problems for our pets, from mild skin irritation to severe allergies, and in the case of ticks, paralysis and even death.

So how do we go about protecting our pets from these parasites, and why is it so important? Different approaches are needed for fleas and paralysis ticks, so I shall discuss their control separately. Furthermore, paralysis tick control is only important in pets that live in or are visiting paralysis tick areas.

Flea infestations are extremely common on pets and in the home environment in Sydney, especially in the warmer months of the year. A flea infestation on your pet can have one of several outcomes. In some pets the infestation just causes skin irritation, resulting in scratching. A severe infestation can result in anaemia due to the large volume of blood being consumed by the fleas. In other pets, a flea infestation can result in flea allergy dermatitis. Flea allergy dermatitis (FAD) is the most common skin condition affecting dogs and cats in the world.

Flea allergy dermatitis is the result of an allergic reaction to the saliva of the flea. Affected animals are usually intensely itchy with red skin, hair loss and an unpleasant odour due to secondary infections. Effective flea control is particularly important on pets with FAD due to the severe skin trauma that can result from a single flea bite. The other compelling reason for all pet owners to practise effective flea control is that fleas are responsible for the production and transmission of several diseases of humans and their pets.

Treatment of flea allergy dermatitis involves elimination of fleas from your pet, prevention of re-infestation from the environment and managing the allergic reaction and itch.

The best products for eliminating fleas from your pets are sprays and spot-ons that are applied to the skin. Your veterinarian can advise you what brands are most effective. Organophosphate (OP) based rinses are very effective at killing fleas but are toxic to both pets and people and are best avoided. If you have a flea rinse at home and are unsure if it is an OP, just check the label. If it is an OP there will be a statement that the product is a "cholinesterase inhibitor".

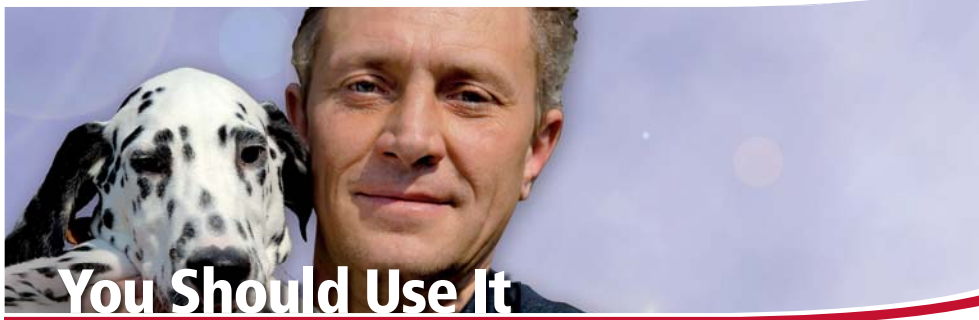
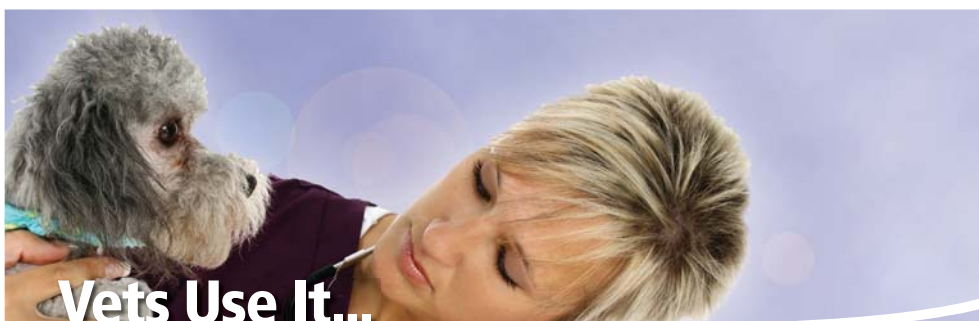
Eliminating the immature fleas in the environment is essential in preventing re-infestation. Each female flea may lay over 2000 eggs in her lifetime. Good flea control will not be achieved if the environment is not treated. The best approach to environmental control involves regular vacuuming of pet areas and washing of bedding. Dead vegetation should also be removed from pet areas outside. Your veterinarian can recommend products that prevent flea eggs from hatching.

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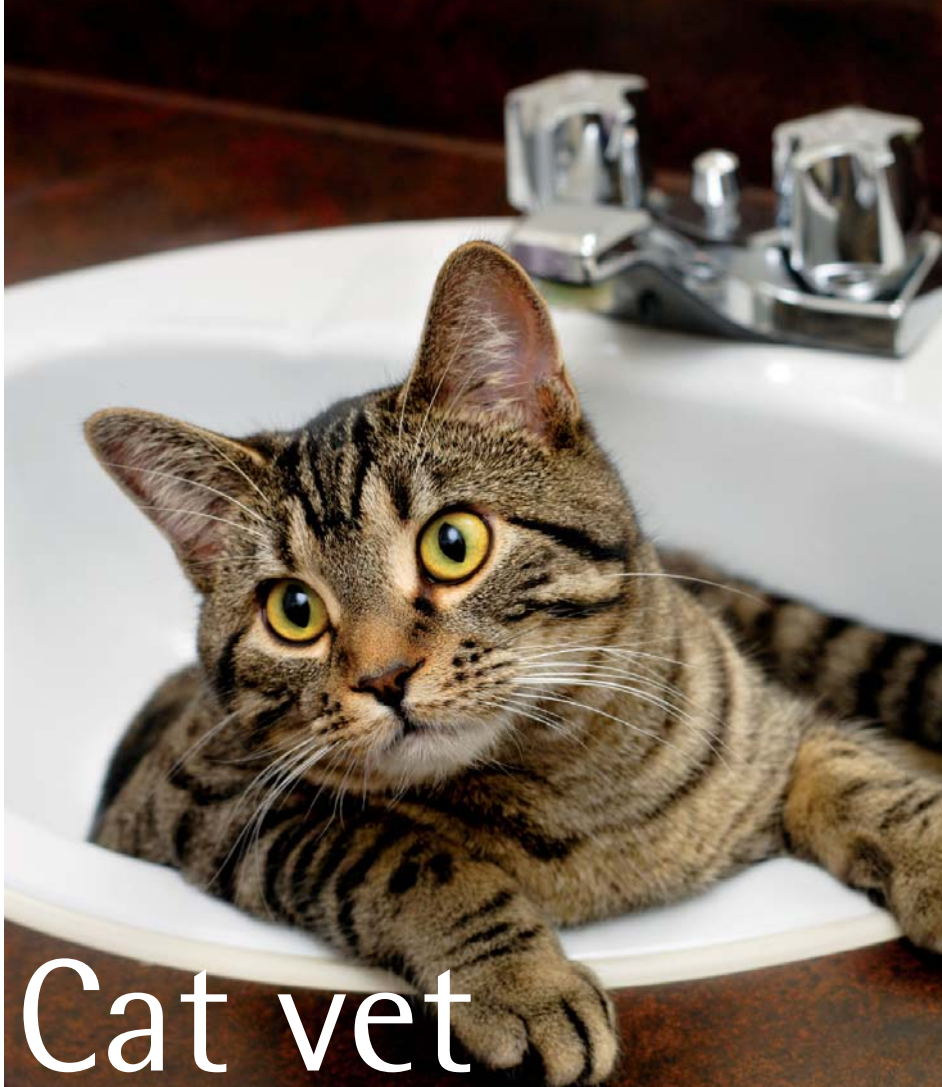
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Cat vet

**Melissa Catt BVSc
Paddington Cat Hospital**



Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

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If your pet has flea allergy dermatitis a trip to the vet will be necessary to get the allergy under control. Short courses of anti-inflammatory medication will get the allergy in check. This will involve the use of cortisone type drugs. Used in low doses and for short periods of time these drugs are extremely safe, well tolerated and effective. They are not suitable however for long term use. They are only used while the flea infestation is being resolved.

Paralysis ticks, whilst not as widely distributed as fleas, are nasty little critters that can kill dogs and cats. It is also interesting (if not scary) to note that paralysis ticks have caused more human deaths (20 reported deaths) than any other Australian arachnid, including the funnelweb spider (13 attributable deaths) and the redback spider (14 deaths).

Pets that live in or visit paralysis tick areas should be thoroughly checked on a daily basis, as well as receiving some form of treatment that kills ticks. The paralysis tick lives along the east coast of Australia, extending about 30km inland. They are most abundant between nearly spring and late autumn in areas surrounded by bush. If you are unsure if you are in a tick area (or about to travel to one with your dog) your best bet is to phone the local vet and ask.

There are three types of product that can be used in dogs to kill the paralysis tick. There are tablets that can be given to the dog, sprays and spot-on preparations, and tick collars. You should not use more than one product on your pet at a time. It is important to speak with your vet (or vet nurse) about which products can be used safely in your pet, as well as how to use the product so that it is effective against ticks. It is important to remember that whilst these products are quite effective when used properly, they are not foolproof and are no substitute for thorough daily examination of your dog for ticks.

So while we are all enjoying the great things that summer has to offer, let's not forget about keeping our four legged friends healthy and irritation free.

"Man and flea roamed the Earth and lived in relative harmony—until we domesticated the cat and dog!"
- Anonymous

Why we hate fleas and why fleas love us—or at least our furry pets

As Dr Adam has mentioned, summer is a time where vets get ready to deal with all sorts of problems, including ticks, allergies, and fleas. Sydney has the perfect environment for fleas—warm and humid, and plenty of dogs and cats to feed from!

A little knowledge of the flea lifecycle is important for understanding how to deal with fleas, and why sometimes they seem to be everywhere despite following all the recommendations.

Once a flea egg hatches, it forms a larva, then a pupa, then the adult emerges from the cocoon. It is only the adult form of the flea that lives on the animal, and adults only make up a relatively small percentage of the total flea population. The adult flea finds a host to feed from, and dog and cat fleas aren't really fussy, so they'll bite whichever animal is closest. They don't particularly like human blood, but if there are lots of fleas, then they will jump on and bite people as a last resort (and some people seem to taste better than others!!).

After having a blood meal, the flea can lay lots of eggs (as many as 2,000 in its lifetime), and if the conditions are right, then those eggs will reach full maturity in only three weeks. The best conditions in which fleas hatch and reproduce are warm (approximately 17°C or over) and humid (70% humidity), so that's why we are seeing so many of the little critters at this time of year! As an example, if a cat is an indoor cat only, with no fleas and no eggs around, and the owner happens to bring in one flea or flea egg on their shoe after walking on a footpath where there has been an infected dog or cat, it may only take a few weeks to potentially have thousands of fleas in the immediate environment!

Flea eggs are particularly troublesome, as they have a very hard protective shell, and can survive in the environment for many months (even if it's cold). In Sydney, because our winters are not very harsh, it is not unusual to have a few fleas here and there still producing more eggs, but because there are so few, they aren't noticed by the owner and very often the animal isn't on any flea control over this time. This allows the numbers of flea eggs to gradually build up; so by the time we have a warm spring day (and we typically see this in September) there can be huge numbers of eggs all ready to hatch at the one time. This can be overwhelming for any flea product, no matter how effective it is.

Checking for fleas regularly is important to ensure a problem doesn't occur in the first place. Often it is the flea 'dirt' (actually droppings of digested blood) that is seen, rather than the fleas themselves. One trick if you're not sure your cat or dog has normal dirt or flea dirt in their coat or on your bed, is to take some and place it on a very damp tissue. Wait 30 seconds, and see if the colour turns dark red, indicating the digested blood of flea droppings! A flea comb (very fine toothed) is invaluable in helping to locate fleas and flea dirt, especially on darker coloured animals.

As Dr Adam has mentioned in his column, the most effective long term flea products are the spot-on formulas that are applied once monthly. These are all very safe, and effective to varying degrees. Some treat heartworm and intestinal worms as well, which is very handy for cats who don't like taking medications orally. Unfortunately, the versions that kill the fleas most quickly don't last as long, and the ones that are still very effective at the end of the month can take up to 24 hours to kill the fleas. This means that when we have a bad flea problem, your vet will usually recommend a combination of things—a monthly spot-on; a tablet called Capstar which is effective at killing the fleas quickly (within half an hour, but it only lasts for 1 day in dogs and 2 days in cats) up to every 2nd day; and advice on how you can reduce the number of flea eggs in the environment.

The measures can be as simple as thoroughly vacuuming your home environment (including moving furniture and doing the skirting boards, as the larval forms crawl away from light), and washing bedding. Sometimes a flea bomb may be indicated. These days, we don't recommend using many of the old fashioned flea shampoos and rinses as they tend to contain products that are not effective and can be potentially toxic.* If there is a lot of flea dirt, then a wash might be a good idea (if your cat is amenable), but my preference is to comb the debris out of the cat's coat with the flea comb instead.

Sometimes, people find that there is a big flea burden after they have been away for a while, and assume that the animal picked fleas up from the place where they have been staying. This is of course possible (especially if the animal isn't on current flea control), but the usual explanation is that the pupae have been lying waiting for some movement before hatching from their cocoon. The pupal form of fleas is motion sensitive, and they'll wait until there are vibrations in the floor before hatching. So a good vacuum just before going away or when you return from holidays is recommended—even though it not be entirely practical. Ensuring your pets are up to date with their flea measures is vital.

Whether you have dogs or cats (or a combination), one or many, indoor or outdoor—if you get through the Sydney summer flea free, you will be the exception rather than the rule!

* see Dr Adam's explanation on OP (Organophosphate) rinses



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Reference: 1. Burton,G., Shipstone,M., and Burrows,M., (2003) Veterinary guidelines for the Control of Fleas in Dogs and Cats in Australia, *Aust Vet Practit* 33 (3) 117-124. Merial Australia Pty Ltd, Level 6, 79 George Street, Parramatta NSW 2150. ©FRONTLINE and FRONTLINE PLUS are registered trademarks of Merial. ©Advantage is a registered trademark of Bayer AG. ©Revolution is a registered trademark of Pfizer Products Inc. ©2006 Merial Limited. All rights reserved. FRLN-06-052. H&T. MCA0003/UB

Bird and exotics vet

Summertime, the Festive Season and Your Bird

Summer weather is now upon us. With it comes hot weather, holidays and the festive season

Our birds love this time of year. They usually love the long warm days in daylight saving and the holiday period when we are often off work so we are more likely to be at home with them during daylight hours. There are also lots of fresh native plants and fruits around for them to chew on and play with.

However, there are many hazards at this time of year for our birds. Most parrots can live in very hot climates and our Australian natives often come from very dry hot areas of Australia. Yet in our hot, humid climate they may still overheat. Signs to look for are having the feathers sleek and flat (not fluffed up) on the body while the wings are outstretched fanning back and forth with very hard open-mouthed breathing. To avoid overheating, keep your birds inside on hot days and away from direct sunlight from windows. On hot days you should spray your bird several times a day with a fine mist of water—you can buy clean spray bottles from your local hardware store but make sure they've never been used to contain any other liquids.

Hot weather also means open windows. Our birds are meant to fly and will often head towards an open window or door. All birds, even those with clipped wings, find it easy to get lift and fly on a warm windy day. On such days try not to take your bird outside. If you do need to open the windows, it is best to place non-toxic fly screen mesh on doors and windows. Try not to let your bird chew them, as even with the safer less toxic flyscreens, they will make holes in them and escape or ingest enough to still cause a problem.

Fans are a great way to keep our houses cool but they can be a potential hazard to many birds. Years ago I lived and worked in North Queensland and it was not uncommon to see birds that had been hit by fan blades. So when fans—especially unprotected ceiling fans—are turned on, your birds need to be safely in their cage.

The long days of summer, with many of us home, may mean long nights for birds. Many clients tell me their parrot stays up with them till they go to bed. Often in the festive season we are on holidays and this means we stay up even later than usual. It is great fun to spend time with your bird and your bird will love all the attention. However, birds need 10–14 hours restful sleep a day. Keeping a bird up late at night with not enough sleep has the same effect on them that it has on us but with more problems. They may become tired and cranky, play up more and have tantrums. Less sleep and decreased dark hours will make them moult (change their feathers) more often. This decreases their immune system. That, combined with lack of sleep, will make them

more susceptible to diseases. The longer hours can also set off breeding behaviour and may lead to egg laying in hens. Birds that are breeding are often more demanding and aggressive and may exhibit cage guarding. To avoid all these problems cover your bird up with a dark cloth from at least 8.00pm till 7.00am.



Dr Alex Rosenwax – BVSC MACVSc (Avian Health) Bird & Exotics Veterinarian, Green Square.

Alex graduated from the University of Sydney in 1991. He achieved Membership of the Avian Health Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in 1996. In November 1996 he opened the first and only Sydney all bird and exotic pet practice. The Clinic moved to 1 Hunter St Waterloo in 2003 and sees approximately 80% birds, and 20% fish, reptiles and other exotic pets. Alex is the current president of the Australian Veterinary Association Avian Group.

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During the holidays many of us may be away for a night or two. The weather is hot and if your bird knocks over its food and water it may quickly dehydrate and small birds may start to starve. Leaving at night and coming back the next day may be okay, but if you are away for any longer make sure a friend or neighbour drops in to check on them. If you are going to leave your bird with a friend then make sure they are familiar with birds. If they have any birds of their own check their birds are healthy. Very often I see birds that although annually health checked at our clinic, come in with infectious diseases caught from another bird they were staying with. Make sure the other birds your bird comes in contact with have also been health checked by an avian veterinarian.

The festive season also brings for some people presents, decorations, toys and food. Some of these are hazardous to birds. Most metallic Christmas decorations are toxic to birds if eaten. Some of our favourite presents such as chocolate and certain flowers are also poisonous to birds. Even the things we celebrate with such as champagne cork wires and some metal foils on wine are extremely toxic to our birds. No year passes without me having to deal with a bird that has suffered poisoning from decorations or presents that were left lying around the house. They love shiny objects and will definitely be attracted to them and try to chew them.

During the holiday season many of us buy toys for our loved pet birds. A lot of toys, even some of those that claim to be bird safe, are not so safe. Avoid toys that have any metal objects, chains or ties on them. Try to stick to toys that are made of wood or solid plastic with only vegetable dyes for colouring. Better still, find some native plants for your bird to eat. Often we have time during the summer to search for grasses and native plants. Bottlebrush, grevilleas, gum tree and melaleuca (paper bark) trees all have flowers, leaves and branches that the birds love to chew. Pinecones, banksias and gum nuts give parrots more pleasure than most other toys. If you are unable to find or unsure which are safe native plants then you may now be able to buy them. Some of these native bush toys are now threaded together and available from bird suppliers. The more safe toys and native plant toys you have available, the less chance your birds are going to search out for other objects and decorations around the house to chew.

So enjoy the long summer days with your bird and keep them safe, healthy and entertained.