

Does My New Kitten Have Fleas?

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, gives tips on how to evaluate your kitty, with a vet's help.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: I am getting a 7-week-old kitten from a friend. I am told that the kitten might have fleas. I went by a local pet store to see if I could purchase a shampoo or flea treatment to use on her once I get her home. All the products I saw said not to use on a kitten under 12 weeks of age. I have no other animals in the house. Is there a product I can purchase that is safe for the kitten to use to ensure she has no fleas? If she does have fleas, will the fleas invade my house once I bring her home?

A: First, you should establish whether or not the kitten does indeed have fleas. Before bringing the kitten into your home, examine it at your friend's home. If you see live fleas crawling on the kitten, it is obvious that the cat has fleas. If you don't see live fleas, but you see black specks around the base of the hair shafts, almost as if someone sprinkled a pepper shaker on the kitten, this is pretty good evidence that the kitten does have live fleas on it somewhere. These specks are what we nicely call "flea dirt," and is actually flea poop. Lovely, huh?

A better idea would be to have you both go to a veterinarian, together, for the kitten's initial examination. The vet can test the cat for feline leukemia virus, give the first distemper vaccine, deworm it and evaluate for ear mites and fleas. Bring a fecal sample, too. If fleas are seen, your vet can prescribe a once-a-month topical flea product that will quickly and effectively solve the problem. The majority of these monthly topical flea products are labeled for kittens 8 weeks and older.