

## Flea Allergy Misconceptions

**A veterinary dermatologist explains five common misconceptions about fleas and offers tips to help dog and cat owners protect their pets.**

Posted: July 12, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

Each summer, veterinary dermatologists see an increase in canine and feline patients with flea allergies. The allergies occur when flea saliva from flea bites comes in contact with dogs' and cats' skin. This year, many veterinarians report an increase in flea problems.

"I'm seeing more patients with fleas on them, as opposed to a year or two ago," said Heather Willis-Goulet, DVM, a board-certified veterinary dermatologist at Florida Veterinary Specialists in Tampa. "And, it's definitely worse in the spring or summertime."

Willis-Goulet said pet owners can take steps to protect their cats and dogs against fleas. She revealed the truth about five common misconceptions about fleas:

1. If you don't see fleas on your pet, there's no need to worry about a flea allergy. FALSE!

"Even if you don't see fleas, your pet can have a flea allergy," Willis-Goulet said. "One flea bite from a flea can cause an allergic reaction."

2. When it comes to a flea, you only need to worry about a flea bite. FALSE!

Willis-Goulet cautioned that tapeworms can result if a cat or dog eats a flea. Symptoms of tapeworm infection include tiny little white worms or rice-like segments on the pet's backside or bedding.

3. You don't need to worry about treating your yard or home for fleas. FALSE!

If you have a severe flea problem, you should consider treating the yard and house. Keep in mind that fleas like moist, dark areas, such as rubbish piles and thatch patches. Be sure to treat the shady parts of your yard. Inside your home, keep in mind that fleas will hide under your couch and in dark areas. Be sure to use products that are safe for your cats.

4. Most pet owners are using their flea products correctly. FALSE!

When applying flea control products to their pets, some owners do not use the entire dose, Willis-Goulet said. Additionally, some owners will split one dose between two pets. Many owners do not apply the products as frequently as recommended, Willis-Goulet added. "We see failures in products during a great flea season because people are not using it as frequently as they should," she said.

5. Cats and dogs can share the same products. FALSE!

"You cannot put dog flea control products on a cat. Many will kill a cat," Willis-Goulet said. "Some of them are just downright toxic to cats." Willis-Goulet cautioned cat owners to read labels very carefully to ensure the product is formulated specifically for cats. Be sure to read the label completely before applying and that the dose you use is appropriate for your cat's weight.