

Kennels usually aren't responsible for post-vacation fleas

NEWARK, Del. — Worn out after a whirlwind two-week vacation tour, the Smiths picked up their dog at the kennel and went home to relax. Their relaxation was short-lived.

Before long, everyone in the family started scratching, especially from the knees down. Kathy Smith walked across the living room rug in her white socks and found dozens of small, dark, wingless insects clinging to the terry cloth.

Correctly identifying the problem as fleas, Mrs. Smith angrily telephoned the kennel director.

"We've never had this problem before Fuzzy stayed in your kennel!"

The Smiths shouldn't blame the kennel, says University of Delaware extension entomologist Mark Graustein. Almost assuredly, those fleas were present in the house before the family departed. To understand what really happened, it's necessary to

know something about the reproductive habits of fleas.

Fleas usually mate on the feathers or fur of an animal. The female flea requires a blood meal before she can lay her eggs. She may lay them on an animal, a carpet, or an animal's bedding. In two to three weeks, the eggs hatch into larvae which feed on dried blood excreted by adult female fleas. After the feeding period, they form cocoons in which to pupate.

Most fleas require 30 to 75 days to complete a life cycle when proper moisture and warmth are available. They can survive several weeks away from a host animal without feeding.

Under ordinary circumstances, any fleas that hatch on a carpet soon find their way back to the family pet. But when the Smiths and their dog were away, increasing numbers of fleas had no source of food for two weeks. So when the family came home, they became targets for that long-

awaited blood meal.

Graustein offers this advice for people with a similar flea problem:

To control fleas, vacuum thoroughly, particularly around baseboards, under furniture, in cracks and crevices, upholstered furniture, and anywhere pets rest. The vacuum bag containing the fleas should be sealed in a garbage bag for immediate disposal.

Sometimes vacuuming alone can control an infestation, Graustein says. More often, though, the house will need treatment with an approved insecticide. The most effective chemicals for flea control are labeled for professional use only, so you may need to contact a pest control operator.

To handle the problem yourself, choose a product labeled for the control of fleas, and spray according to the manufacturer's instructions. Move all furniture and spray everywhere you

previously vacuumed, including upholstered furniture and the pet's sleeping area. In warm weather it may also be necessary to control fleas in the yard. Most chemicals for flea control can be used out of doors.

Many people discovering fleas outside their dwelling mistakenly call them sand fleas. Graustein says there are no fleas of this name. However, many kinds of fleas, such as cat or dog fleas, develop in sandy places because they were dropped there by infested animals. A dog or cat sleeping on a jute doormat or under a porch may spread enough fleas to start an infestation.

For effective control, you must also eliminate fleas on your pet.

Graustein says to use an approved dust, spray or flea collar. At first, two applications a week may be necessary. But as the fleas begin to disappear, you can spray or dust less often, and perhaps stop altogether. Five percent Sevin dust works well, Graustein says, and the flea collars with Vapona work better than others.

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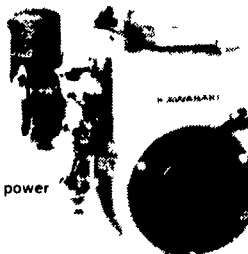
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