

Creepy, Crawly Things

Without a doubt, parasite control is one of the most important – and commonly overlooked – health management concerns for our pets. Parasites are responsible for a wide variety of health problems...from painful skin infections, itching and irritation caused by fleas and mites, to chronic gastrointestinal disease, heart and lung disease, and serious infectious diseases such as Lyme disease and ehrlichiosis. The following information, along with advice from your veterinarian, will help to keep you, your pets and your home free of these unwelcome guests.

Intestinal parasites can be spread through ingestion of contaminated feces, insects, and rodents, and directly from mothers to their young. Some are contagious to humans. Roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms, giardia, and coccidian are prevalent in our area and can be identified and controlled through routine fecal exams, periodic deworming, and the use of certain heartworm preventatives that also control intestinal worms. Cleaning up after your dog and keeping your cat indoors can greatly reduce the risk of spreading intestinal parasites.

Heartworms are blood parasites that are transmitted through the bite of infected mosquitoes. Left untreated, these worms can clog up blood vessels and heart chambers causing serious heart and lung disease and even death. This parasite, while more common in dogs, can affect cats as well. Interceptor, Sentinel, Revolution, Heartguard and generic equivalents are safe and effective and should be used monthly to prevent heartworm infection. At Del Ray Animal Hospital we recommend year round prevention and annual blood tests for dogs.

There are many products on the market today to help control fleas and ticks. Your choice of products will be dictated by your pet's lifestyle, safety, efficacy, costs, and your veterinarian's recommendations. Some products may work well for some pets and not so well for others. We recommend using preventative from April – December.

Most "spot-on" over the counter products contain a combination of permethrins and insect growth regulators(IGRs). Many fleas have developed resistance to permethrins and some of these products are extremely toxic to cats. Read labels carefully and never use a dog product on a cat.

Imidacloprid (Advantage) kills and repels fleas and larvae for up to one month but can be applied as often as once a week for severe infestations. Fleas are dead within 12 hours of application. It can be used on dogs as young as 7 weeks of age and cats 8 weeks of age. Advantix is a product that contains imidacloprid and a permethrin additive to kill ticks. This product should never be used on cats or on dogs that live closely with cats.

Fipronil with methoprene (Frontline plus) kills fleas, eggs, larvae, lice, and ticks and has good water resistance. It should be applied to the skin once a month. Water immersions should be avoided for two days before and after application. It is safe for puppies and kittens 8 weeks and older.

Lufenuron (Sentinel and Program) prevents flea reproduction by inhibiting development of flea eggs and larvae. It is not a pesticide and will not prevent flea bite allergy or the spread of infectious diseases. It does act as a flea “birth control pill” and may be a good choice for people who want to avoid coming into contact with topical pesticides. In order for it to be effective, all pets in the household need to be taking it.

Nitenpyram (Capstar) is a pill given orally that provides a one time kill of adult fleas within 3-4 hours of dosing. It can be used in combination with other products and does no repel adult fleas. This product may be preferred by owners concerned about pesticide residue.

Insect growth regulators such as methoprene and pyriproxyten target eggs and larvae and can be found in products used to treat the home as well as products used on your pet. These products break the flea life cycle, but do not kill adults.

Selamectin (Revolution) can be used monthly on dogs and cats. It kills adult fleas, prevents heartworms and certain intestinal parasites, ear and scabies mites, prevents fleas from hatching and controls ticks on dogs. It is applied topically, absorbed through the skin and redistributed to various organs. It is safe for pets 6 weeks and older.

Amitraz (Preventic) collar is for dogs only. This is the most effective tick control product available, but it does not treat fleas. It works for three months. It is not recommended for puppies that may chew the collar or dogs living with small children who may touch the collar and then put their hands in their mouths. It can be combined with other flea products.

All topical medications can be affected by bathing or wetting though some are more water resistant than others. As flea populations develop resistance, we will most certainly see new products appear on the market and our recommendations for treatment may eventually change.

Talk with your veterinarian about developing an integrated parasite control program that will keep you and your pets healthy and happy.