

IN-DEPTH GUIDE

Fleas and ticks: the complete homeowner's guide

Everything a homeowner needs in one place, based on public guidance from the U.S. EPA and CDC, with links to every source.

PestGuardCo.com · To reach an independent local pest control company, call (855) 424-9709.

> Plain-language summary of public guidance from the U.S. EPA and CDC · Updated November 2026

Check these first

1. **Check your pet**: part the fur near the tail and belly and look for tiny dark fleas or black specks (flea dirt).
2. **Look for bites on ankles and shins**. That's typical of fleas.
3. **Check pet beds, rugs and couches** where pets rest.
4. **Do a tick check** after time outside: behind knees, waist, armpits, scalp and behind ears.
5. **Look at the yard**: tall grass, leaf piles and brush at the lawn edge hold ticks.

6 **Think about strays or rodents** near the house. They can bring fleas.

If you see this, it usually means...

IF YOU SEE

Pet scratching and black specks in the fur

IT USUALLY MEANS

Fleas on the pet

NEXT STEP

Call your vet about flea treatment, and clean the house at the same time.

IF YOU SEE

Itchy bites mostly on ankles

IT USUALLY MEANS

Fleas in carpets or pet areas

NEXT STEP

Vacuum daily and wash pet bedding on hot.

IF YOU SEE

Fleas still around after treating the pet

IT USUALLY MEANS

Eggs and young fleas in the home

NEXT STEP

Keep vacuuming; young fleas keep hatching for weeks.

IF YOU SEE

A tick attached to skin

IT USUALLY MEANS

A tick bite

NEXT STEP

Remove it with fine-tipped tweezers right away.

IF YOU SEE

Ticks found often after yard time

IT USUALLY MEANS

Ticks in tall grass, brush or leaf litter

NEXT STEP

Create a tick-safe zone and consider yard treatment.

How to tell what you have

Flea

Tiny (1/8 in.), dark reddish-brown, flat side to side, jumps.

Bites in clusters, often on ankles; linked to pets.

vs

Tick

Small, flat, oval with 8 legs; swells after feeding; doesn't jump.

Attaches and stays on; found after time outdoors.

SIZE

1/16 to 1/8 in.

COLOR

Dark brown to reddish

WHERE

Carpets, pet beds, yard edges

WHEN

Spring through fall

Fleas: treat the pet and the home together

CDC's advice: the most effective way to prevent fleas on people is to keep fleas off your pets. Talk to your veterinarian about products, treat pets year-round, and always follow product instructions.

Adult fleas on the pet are only part of the problem; eggs, larvae and pupae live in carpets, bedding and furniture. Vacuuming often and washing pet bedding breaks the cycle while the pet treatment works.

Keeping fleas out of the home and yard

CDC suggests sealing holes where rodents can enter, keeping tight lids on trash cans, and not feeding or petting strays. Fleas prefer shady, humid places, so sunlight and short grass make yards less friendly to them.

Ticks: protect people first

CDC: reducing exposure to ticks is the most effective defense against tickborne diseases. Use EPA-registered insect repellent, wear long, loose clothing outdoors, and consider clothing treated with permethrin.

After coming inside, check your body and your pets for ticks, shower soon, and tumble dry clothes on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing.

Make the yard less tick-friendly

Clear tall grass and brush around the house and at the lawn edge, remove leaf litter, and put a 3-foot barrier of wood chips or gravel between lawns and wooded areas. Keep play equipment and patios away from yard edges.

CDC notes that pesticides can reduce ticks in treated areas, but you shouldn't rely on spraying alone to prevent bites.

What to do and what to avoid

Do

- Talk to your vet about flea and tick products that suit your pet.
- Vacuum carpets, rugs, furniture and pet areas, and empty the vacuum outside.
- Wash pet bedding and throws on hot.
- After outdoor time, do a full tick check and shower soon after.
- Tumble dry outdoor clothes on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks (CDC).

Avoid

- × Don't use dog flea products on cats. Some are dangerous to them; follow the label and your vet's advice.
- × Don't treat only the pet. Most fleas live in the home as eggs and young fleas.
- × Don't twist, burn or smother a tick with petroleum jelly. Pull it straight out with tweezers.
- × Don't rely on yard spraying alone for tick safety; CDC says personal protection still matters.

Health and safety

- Ticks can spread germs that cause illnesses such as Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. CDC: ticks are most active April through September, but bites happen year-round.
- Fleas can spread germs too, such as flea-borne typhus. See a doctor if you get fever, aches or a rash after flea or tick exposure.
- Remove attached ticks promptly with fine-tipped tweezers, pulling straight up, then clean the area.

Prevention checklist

- Keep pets on year-round flea and tick prevention, as your vet advises.
- Mow often and remove leaf litter and tall grass at the lawn edge.
- Put a barrier of wood chips or gravel between lawns and wooded areas (CDC tick-safe zone).
- Keep play sets and patios away from yard edges and trees.
- Seal gaps that let rodents and strays get under porches and decks.
- Vacuum often where pets sleep.

When to call a pro

Call a pro if fleas are still around after a few weeks of pet treatment and vacuuming, or if you keep finding ticks after time in your own yard.

1

Inspection

Finding where fleas are breeding indoors, or where ticks are concentrated in the yard.

2

Indoor treatment

Treating carpets and pet areas, timed with your vet's pet treatment.

3

Yard treatment

Treating tick and flea hot spots: shady edges, brush and pet resting spots.

4

Follow-up

A second visit for fleas is common, since eggs keep hatching.

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Questions

Why do I still have fleas after treating my pet?

Eggs and young fleas in carpets and furniture keep hatching for weeks. Keep vacuuming and keep the pet on treatment, and it should taper off.

Can fleas live in a house without pets?

For a while. Fleas can come in on rodents or strays near the house, or stay behind after a previous owner's pets.

How do I remove a tick?

Grip it close to the skin with fine-tipped tweezers and pull straight up with steady pressure. Clean the area and your hands afterward.

When are ticks most active?

CDC says most active in warmer months, April to September, though bites can happen year-round.

Sources

Preventing Fleas (https://www.cdc.gov/fleas/prevention/index.html) **CDC**

Preventing Tick Bites (https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/prevention/index.html) **CDC**

Prevent Mosquito and Tick Bites (Fight the Bite) (https://www.cdc.gov/fight-the-bite/prevent/index.html) **CDC**

Preventing Mosquito and Tick Bites: Key Points (https://www.cdc.gov/vector-borne-diseases/prevention/index.html) **CDC**

This guide is PestGuard's own plain-language summary of public guidance from U.S. government agencies (EPA and CDC). U.S. federal government publications are generally in the public domain; follow the links to read the originals. It is general information, not an official government publication and not a substitute for an inspection. If you use any pest control product, read and follow the label. In an emergency, call 911. For pesticide questions, the National Pesticide Information Center can help: 1-800-858-7378.