Fleas are annoying to people and pets, especially during spring and early summer when their numbers tend to increase dramatically.

The common flea in California is the cat flea. Despite its name, this flea attacks both dogs and cats and will also bite humans. To keep fleas out of your home, control fleas on your pet and regularly clean pet sleeping areas.

On the pet

A number of very effective and safe products for flea control on the pet are available. You must supplement pet treatments with regular cleaning of your home and periodic combing with a pet flea comb to detect new infestations.

- Spot-on formulations are applied to the animal’s coat. Use as directed on the label. These are available from veterinarians, over-the-counter, or online.
- Systemic flea control products, available from vets, are given as a pill or food treat.
- Flea collars containing imidacloprid and flumethrin are effective against fleas and ticks. Collars with insect growth regulators (IGRs) affect eggs and immature fleas. Be sure to choose collars containing methoprene or pyriproxyfen.
- Flea shampoos and soaps, powders and dusts, spray-on liquids, and dips are less effective and more hazardous to pets, people, and the environment than the three types of products above.

Inside the home

Whether or not you are aware of fleas in your home, regularly vacuum and launder areas where your pet rests. If you have a major flea problem, treat your pet with one of the options above and follow the steps below.

- Locate heavily infested areas (usually areas where the pet rests) and concentrate treatment there.
- Wash throw rugs and pet bedding.
- Vacuum upholstered furniture, cleaning under cushions and in crevices.
- Vacuum carpets, especially beneath furniture.
- Use a hand sprayer or aerosol to treat all carpets and unwashable upholstered furniture with an insecticide that contains an IGR (methoprene or pyriproxyfen). This treatment kills larvae but not pupae, so fleas may continue to emerge for up to 2 weeks.
- Over the next 2 weeks, vacuum regularly to remove adult fleas that emerge from pupae. Do not reapply pesticides.
- Seal vacuum bags and discard them so fleas don’t escape.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.

For more information about managing pests, visit ipm.ucanr.edu or your local University of California Cooperative Extension office.