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Fleas Attacking Vacant Houses

How did they get there, and when?

Vacant homes for rent or sale, vacation homes or cottages that are occupied intermittently, all can have active flea infestation even though there are no people or pests present. When you don't know the history of previous occupants, the assumption is that there once were pets staying in the house and they left fleas behind.

Another possibility is that wild animals like, squirrels, and even feral dogs and cats have been nesting in the attic or denning under that house. We say "have been nesting..." because as long as the animals are still present, adult fleas would not likely be attacking people. There might even be rats present in the roof.

Usually, it's only after the animals have died, been evicted, or otherwise moved on, that the flea eggs and larvae they left would develop into adult fleas looking for a new host. Adult fleas that are left without a host can survive for months without feeding.

In trying to track the original source of the fleas, the question may come up: "How long have these fleas been here?" Really hard to say because the flea life cycle is so variable. Fleas have adapted to wait out the bad times when there's no host animal around, and they can wait for months. Here are the ranges for each stage of the cat flea:

- Eggs hatch in 2 to 12 days
- Larvae develop in 7 days to several months
- Pupal development takes 4 to 14 days
- Adult can remain in pupal cocoon up to one year waiting for a host

If you add all the stages, you can see that the fleas could have come from eggs that dropped off an occupant's pet just 3 weeks earlier



of the flea lifecycle. The shortest development times above are for ideal conditions with humidity levels of 45-95%. The Adult flea's lifespan increases with higher humidity and lower temperatures. When larval development drags on for weeks, it is usually because conditions are too dry or there is little larval food in the form of adult flea faeces.

Vacuuming may encourage flea emergence- You may think it will be easier to treat an empty house for fleas, but the down side is that, without the pets or their owners present, you don't know where the "hot spots" are. The hot spots are those places where the pet rests and are consequently the areas where the larvae develop and where adult fleas are waiting in cocoons. If it's a vacation rental with furniture, it may be easier to find hot spots around sofas and beds. You can also walk the premises and see if you attract more fleas in certain locations.

Adult fleas that are waiting for a host are protected from pesticides inside their cocoons. One strategy is to treat the premises first. Then vacuum, ideally with a beater bar. The vibrations and pressure may cause adult fleas to leave their cocoons and come in contact with the pesticide.

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(if conditions are ideal), or they could be from eggs deposited almost a year ago, especially if there have been no occupants since.

To answer "how long", you also have to consider the environmental conditions in the house and the time of year. Has the house been heated? Is the AC on? Humidity is the main factor influencing the length

NOTE: A similar situation can occur when customers go on vacation and either take or board the pets. While everyone is gone, flea eggs hatch; larvae feed and mature, and then pupate. When the residents and pests return home after a few weeks, they are attacked by adult fleas that have been waiting for a host and suddenly emerge from cocoons.

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