

Fleas and the Plague

The weather is warming up outside again and that means that our pets will be exposed to fleas once again. Fleas are a nuisance in and of themselves, but they also carry diseases, including the plague. This is not only a concern to our pets, but if infected, they can transmit the disease to their owners.

The plague is caused by a bacteria called *Yersinia pestis* and can result in 3 forms of the disease: septicemia (a blood infection), bubonic plague (abscessed lymph nodes), or pneumonia. All of these forms are potentially fatal, especially to cats. Infected animals can show signs of swollen or draining lymph nodes around the face and neck, fevers of 103-105 degrees, depression, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, difficulty breathing, loss of appetite, weight loss and dehydration. It is treatable with antibiotics, but must be caught early to increase the chances of survival. Without intervention, only about 24% of cats will survive.

Our outdoor cats are at considerable risk in the Denver area of contracting this disease through infected flea bites and through eating infected rodents, including mice, rats and prairie dogs. Cats are best protected by keeping them indoors and preventing them from hunting. This greatly limits their exposure to *Yersinia pestis*. The other way to help prevent infection is by keeping them free of fleas with a monthly topical treatment like Frontline. This product is easily applied, is waterproof, and can be purchased at Kipling Veterinary Hospital.