Fleas, fleas everywhere, and I don't have pets? What happened and what can I do? [1]

Hi Alice,

I live in a one-bedroom apartment and I have never had any pets. I do not own cats, dogs, or any other pets. I saw 3 fleas in my apartment. My ankles and legs have a total of 20 bites; they are in sets of 2 each. I am itching like crazy. What I don't understand is how can I have a flea problem when I do not own any pets? Also what can I do to get rid of them? I'm also worried because I have an 18-month-old and I don't want them to bite her. What should I do?

Answer

Dear Reader,

First things first? make sure the creepy critters are fleas and not some other type of biting invader, such as bed bugs. Bed bugs can be difficult to recognize, but you can look for images on the web, or ask a pest control company to do an inspection. Now, even though your pad is pet-free, fleas could still have invaded your home in a few ways. Fleas can hitch a ride inside on articles of clothing, and can also be carried on the backs of animals, such as bats, raccoons, opossums, rats, and/or squirrels. If a flea-infested animal nests in a nook or cranny of a building, the fleas can spread to different rooms and apartments. It?s also possible that the fleas were already in your apartment when you got there. For example, flea eggs can lie dormant in a carpet for months until a potential meal walks by and disturbs them? telltale vibrations can cause flea eggs to hatch in seconds.

As per your experience, flea bites usually are found on the feet and ankles. The bites commonly go unnoticed when they happen, but people can experience itching, a rash, and/or irritation after the fact. If the symptoms are bothersome, flea bites can be treated with carbolated petroleum jelly, menthol, ice, or calamine lotion. More severe or persistent symptoms need to be discussed with a health care provider.

Evicting fleas from your apartment is ultimately the best way to protect you and your child from bites. Here are a few tips to keep the bugs (and bites) away:

- Vacuum and/or steam-clean potential flea nesting surfaces thoroughly and regularly. It is an especially good idea to do this around your child?s sleeping area. Make sure you throw away your vacuum bag every week, too, since fleas can survive inside them and potentially re-infest your apartment (this isn?t a concern with steam-cleaning, which kills
adult fleas).
- Clean any rugs and carpets, under furniture and cushions, and along walls.
- Try to keep your child away from moist, dark areas of the apartment where fleas may hang out.
- Let in lots of sunlight. A sunny area is less likely to harbor any fleas.
- Try to keep the air relatively dry? fleas love warm, moist areas.

If you want to use chemicals against the fleas in your apartment, speak with a professional first. A salesperson or professional exterminator can help you choose the safest, most effective treatment for your home. If you decide to use chemicals, use a product that is labeled for indoor use and has clear directions. For safety’s sake, make sure that any treated areas are dry before letting anyone into the space. Also, wear appropriate clothing when applying pesticides? cover your skin with long pants and long-sleeved shirts and, if you’re mixing liquid chemicals, use chemical-resistant gloves, as well. If you have leftover chemicals after treating your apartment, check the instructions for proper disposal methods. This might just involve pouring excess chemicals onto a grassy area so they can biodegrade, or other methods for more toxic chemicals.

Hope you find yourself flea-free!

Alice!
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