



## No. 45: Protecting Pet Health when Using Flea and Tick Control Products

Amy E. Brown, Ph.D., Coordinator  
and

Elizabeth Ingianni, M.S., Program Assistant  
Pesticide Education and Assessment Programs  
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### BACKGROUND

Flea and tick control products can be appropriate treatments for protecting pets and their owners from annoying pests and arthropod-vector diseases. While most people use the products with no harm to their pets, there is a history of misuse and confusion which has, in some cases, led to adverse reactions in pets.

Adverse reactions to these products can include skin irritation and redness, gastrointestinal problems such as vomiting or diarrhea, or nervous system effects such as trembling, loss of balance, or seizures.

Due to a significant increase in reported adverse incidents in 2008, EPA began an intensive evaluation of spot-on pesticide products for flea and tick control for cats and dogs.

### PROPER USE

EPA's analysis identified a number of factors influencing the likelihood of adverse reactions to pet protection products. Consumers can lessen the risk of harm to their animals through awareness of these factors.

#### **Consult a veterinarian about the best way to protect pets from fleas and ticks.**

Pesticides may not always be needed. It is especially important to consult a veterinarian before using any product on medicated, sick, pregnant, or nursing pets, or on pets that have previously shown signs of sensitivity to pesticide products.

#### **Carefully read and follow label directions each time a product is used.**

Exact instructions may vary between seemingly similar products. Also, instructions may change as product formula and safety instructions are updated.

**Only use products on the type of animal specified on the label.** Different animals have different sensitivities to pesticides and other chemicals. Take special care not to use dog products on cats or adult pet products on puppies and kittens.

**Only use the dose specified for the animal's weight.** Proper dosage is determined on the basis of the amount that will be effective – but not toxic to the animal – on the basis of the animal's weight.

**Do not combine products unless specifically directed to do so by a veterinarian or the product instructions.** For example, do not use spot-on treatments after a flea bath or dip. Combining products with the same active ingredient could lead to an overdose. Combining different active ingredients could lead to an increase in toxicity or to inactivation of one of the products.

**Keep treated pets away from people and other animals until the pesticide has dried.** Prior to drying, residues can transfer to others through grooming and other pet interactions.

**Monitor pets for any signs of an adverse reaction after application.** This is particularly important when using a treatment for the first time.

**If an adverse reaction does occur, bathe the animal with mild soap and water.** Contact a veterinarian if there is an emergency.

**Encourage your veterinarian to report any adverse reactions to the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC).** Veterinarians can report incidents by calling 1-800-858-7378 or visiting the Veterinary

Pesticide Adverse Effects Portal at [npic.orst.edu/vet](http://npic.orst.edu/vet).

## REGULATORY RESPONSE

At the time of this publication, EPA is reviewing labels to determine which products need stronger, clearer labeling statements. The Agency is also developing more stringent testing and evaluation requirements for both new and existing products. EPA is taking the following measures to increase the safety of these products:

- Require manufacturers of spot-on pesticide products to improve labeling and make instructions clearer to prevent accidental misuse.
- Require more precise dosage per pet weight instructions.
- Require clear markings to differentiate between dog and cat products, and disallow similar brand names for dog and cat products. Similar names may have led to confusion and misuse.
- Require additional changes based on product-specific evaluations.
- Grant new registered products only conditional, time-limited registrations to allow for post-marketing surveillance. If there are incidents of concern associated with the product, EPA will take appropriate regulatory action.
- Restrict use of certain inert ingredients that EPA finds may contribute to adverse reactions.
- Launch a consumer information campaign to explain new label directions

and help users avoid making medication errors.

In addition, EPA aims to improve the regulatory oversight of pet products. The Agency will require more standardized post-market surveillance, increased reporting on adverse effects, and submission of more sales information. The Agency hopes to better evaluate incident rates and bring up-

to-date the scientific data requirements on pre- and post- market testing so they are more in line with the Food and Drug Administration's requirements.

EPA is coordinating these actions with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Center for Veterinary Medicine as well as with Health Canada.

## SOURCES

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