Desperate House Flies

When the warm weather rolls around, many pets get to spend more time outdoors—frolicking in the yard or at the park. Fleas and ticks aren't the only parasites they may encounter. Believe it or not, flies can be a real pest, too.

Flies are usually harmless to pets, unless something on your pet's skin or fur creates an attraction. Dogs and cats with thick, fluffy coats are at the highest risk for developing a complication due to flies. Flies only need a small break in the skin or a clump of soiled fur to create problems. Dogs that are prone to “hot spots” (areas of the skin that have been licked raw secondary to an itch or irritation), are at the highest risk for developing fly-related problems.

Here are the two most common fly-related problems that veterinarians see in warmer months:

**Maggots**

Common fly species will often find a damaged area of pet skin or a moist clump of fur in which to lay their eggs. Once these eggs hatch, small worm-like larvae emerge; these are what we know as maggots. Maggots are extremely destructive and will actually eat into pets’ flesh, causing serious infections.

The maggots themselves are also very toxic to dogs and cats, and can even put pets into shock. It is a tedious and difficult task to find and carefully remove each of these maggots, which must not be damaged at the consequence of releasing toxic proteins. Once an animal has been attacked by maggots they often require ongoing wound management, antibiotics, drugs to help paralyze the maggots, and intensive hospital care for the shock.

**Cuterebra**

Most veterinarians have witnessed a client scream, faint, or go into a panic attack at the sight of Cuterebra parasites. Cuterebra are bot fly larvae that can burrow into a pet’s skin. They don’t necessarily require a wound to get in, but wounds do increase the risk. Cuterebra are more common in cats, though they can be found in dogs.

Treatment consists of careful removal of the Cuterebra, since these organisms can also release toxic proteins that cause anaphylaxis. The wound caused by the larvae often needs antibiotics and sometimes additional surgery.

**Preventing Fly-Related Problems**

Just knowing these problems exist is a good step toward prevention. Regular brushing and pet cleaning is a great defense. Many hair coat types benefit from a summer haircut, making coat maintenance a lot easier.

Pets should have their hair coats and skin checked for ticks, burrs, and wounds whenever they come in from play. This is a good way to spot any areas that could invite flies. If you do find a wound, call your veterinarian for advice and keep your pet indoors until the wound can be treated.