



Green Paws: Pet Products May Harm Both Pets and Humans

Products intended to kill fleas and ticks can also poison pets and the people who handle them.



As a well-intended pet owner, you might apply off-the-shelf products to your four-legged friend to help kill fleas and ticks. But did you know that these collars, sprays, and dusts—may actually harm your pet, or even your child?

The simple truth is that the chemicals in many of these products are not safe, either for pets or humans. Government regulation of these products has been sketchy. The result is that many of the products sold by the millions in grocery, drug and pet supply stores, even when applied as instructed on the box, can cause serious health consequences to pets and humans. How could the

government let hazardous chemicals be sold on grocery store shelves without applying stringent standards?

You can take simple steps to protect your families and pets from the most toxic chemicals. Visit www.greenpaws.org for information about safer options and other ways to win the war against flea and ticks safely!

Three Simple Steps You Can Take To Keep Your Pets Safe at www.GreenPaws.org.

1 Help get the worst toxics off the shelves completely! With just a few clicks, you can send a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency asking it to ban the use of the most harmful toxics—organophosphates and carbamates—immediately.

2 Learn about natural ways that you can fight fleas and ticks. Also download our free chemical guide, which will tell you what toxic ingredients are the most dangerous for you and your pets as well as offer a couple of suggestions for safer options.

3 Take steps to better inform your veterinarian and other pet owners about safer alternatives for the control of fleas and ticks on pets. Get your step-by-step action kit with all the materials you need online.



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What Are the Most Toxic Chemicals in Flea and Tick Products?

The main culprits are products that rely on a family of chemicals called organophosphates. One of these, tetrachlorvinphos, is still found in stores. Six others were removed from the pet market, one by one, from 2000 through 2006: chlorpyrifos, dichlorvos, phosmet, naled, diazinon and malathion. But many pet owners may still have leftover supplies of products containing these chemicals in their homes. Another dangerous chemical used in pet products is the carbamate chemical called propoxur.

Organophosphates and carbamates work by interfering with the transmission of nerve signals. Since the chemical process they attack is common to insects, humans, dogs and cats, they harm more than just fleas and ticks. Indeed, thousands of calls have been logged at poison control centers across the United States about organophosphate pesticides, and thousands more about pet products. Moreover, ample evidence suggests the possibility of worrisome long-term effects for children exposed to these pesticides at an early age, including later-in-life cancer and perhaps Parkinson's disease.

Children, and particularly toddlers, are especially vulnerable for two reasons. First, their nervous systems are still developing, so the violence done by organophosphates can do greater and more lasting damage. Second, children's normal behavior brings them in close contact with their pets, and therefore to any poisons applied to those pets. In particular, toddlers' hand-to-mouth tendencies make it easy for toxic residues to be ingested, and not just by petting the family dog and then putting their hands in their mouths. Because children spend their time where the residues from pet products tend to accumulate—crawling on rugs, playing with pet toys, handling accumulations of household dust, and more—they are likely to come in contact with these poisons even when they do not touch their pet.

As bad as these products may be for pet owners and caregivers, they often are worse for the pets themselves. Based on the very limited data available, it appears that hundreds and probably thousands of pets have been injured or killed through exposure to pet products containing pesticides. As with small children, pets cannot report when they're being poisoned at low doses.

What Pet Owners Can Do

Prevent fleas by giving your pet regular baths once a week, or at least every-other week using a regular pet shampoo. Pay special attention to the area between the toes, at the base of the tail, and around the ears, where ticks love to hide. Launder your pet's bedding in hot water the same day that you bathe them. Vacuuming carpets at least weekly will eliminate flea eggs that could be hidden there. In most cases, these simple steps will prevent flea infestations from getting started, and your pet will smell better too!

If you do need to use a chemical flea control product, the safest options are generally those dispensed as a pill. These usually contain the least toxic chemicals, and better still they don't leave a residue on your pet or in your home.

Check the label! If you do need to buy an off-the-shelf flea and tick product, avoid flea collars that list tetrachlorvinphos or propoxur as active ingredients. Other products to avoid include permethrin-based products, and tick-control products containing amitraz.



Instead, opt for products whose labels list Lufenuron (Program®), methoprene (Nylar®) and pyriproxyfen (Biolar®). These are three common and effective insect growth regulators.



If you suspect your pet or your child may have suffered negative health effects as a result of a flea product containing OPs or carbamates, consult with your veterinarian or your doctor immediately. If you think a child has been exposed to a pesticide, call your local poison control center. Be sure to report all such incidents to the EPA's National Pesticide Telecommunications Network at 800-858-7378. Let us know if you or someone you love (whether furry or not) has had a toxic reaction to a pet product, email us at greenpaws@nrdc.org.