

## ANIMAL HEALTH

# Controlling Fleas in Your Shelter: Can the Latest Advances Help?

*A new generation of non-toxic, super-effective flea-control products is revolutionizing the way pet owners are fighting fleas. Are they an option for use in your shelter?*

By Leslie Sinclair, DVM

**C***tenocephalides felis*. It's a long name for the most common species in your shelter. No, it's not a cat, a dog, a rabbit, the newest "fad" rodent, or anything else warm and furry. It's the cat flea, and whether your shelter is in Boston or San Francisco, or somewhere in between, you are probably all too familiar with it.

Despite its species-specific name, it is the cat flea that infests both cats and dogs—and sometimes other animals (including you). A heartless parasite, the tiny flea brings misery to your shelter's inhabitants. It bites animals' skin, sucks their blood, and sometimes even infests them with tapeworm eggs. It's one species you don't want to shelter.

Flea control in the animal shelter has always been a difficult battle. Until now, assuming you've chosen not to ignore the problem altogether, your best option has been to douse animals with toxic, foul-smelling dips, sprays, or shampoos. But not only are these flea-control products toxic, they're also rather ineffective; adopted animals may still carry fleas into their new homes, creating flea infestations for adopters and public-relations headaches for your shelter.

## The Next Generation

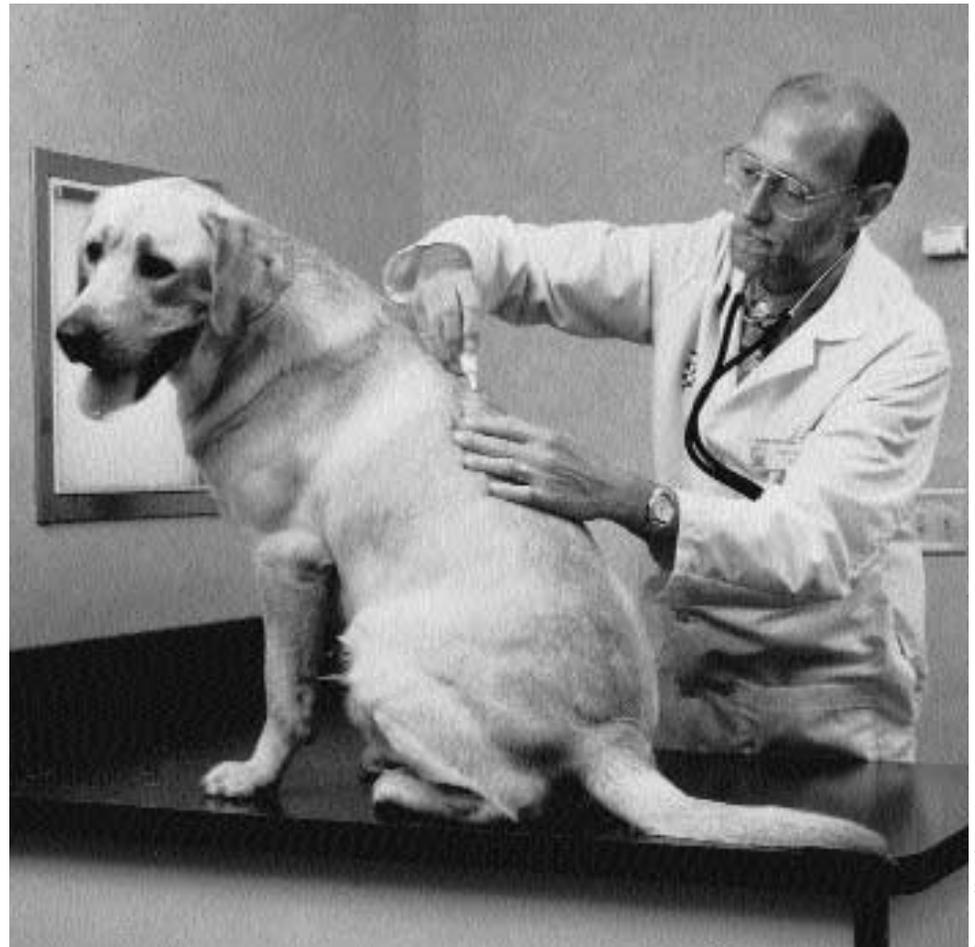
Now there's a more effective way to de-flea your shelter's inhabitants. A new generation of flea-control products has been developed, and two of these products are ideally suited for flea control in the shelter environ-

ment. They are the drug fipronil, marketed by Rhone Merieux, Inc., as Frontline®, and imidacloprid, marketed by Bayer Corporation as Advantage™. Applied to the skin of dogs, cats, puppies, and kittens, the products are non-toxic, easy to use, and highly effective.

For shelters, Frontline and Advantage have a huge upside as well as a

considerable downside. The upside, and what makes both products so appropriate for use in shelters, is their ability to kill virtually every flea on an animal within 24 hours of treatment, and to prevent any new fleas from infesting the animal for one month or longer. The downside are that the products must be used in your shelter under the direction of a vet-

*A veterinarian applies the flea-control product Advantage to a flea-infested patient.*



Courtesy of Bayer Corporation

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erinarian, and that they may cost more than what your shelter currently spends on flea control.

### How They Work

Both Frontline and Advantage can be applied to one or more areas on the animal as a "spot-on" drug. Frontline also comes as a spray which can



*New flea-control products spell danger for fleas and relief for mammals.*

be applied all over the animal and massaged into the skin.

Once applied, Frontline or Advantage is absorbed into the sebaceous glands—those glands in the skin that secrete the oil, or "sebum," onto the animal's skin to keep it supple. From these glands, the products are slowly and continuously released onto the animal's fur. When fleas (and ticks, with Frontline) contact the skin or fur, they absorb the drug through their hard outer shell, develop nervous system damage, and die. Water and shampoo will not diminish the protection that animals get from these products.

### Deadly to Fleas, Safe for Mammals

Frontline and Advantage are much safer than pesticides traditionally used for flea control. That's because the products damage the nervous system of the flea but have no effect on the nervous system of mammals.

The National Animal Poison Control Center has received few reports of problems with Frontline and Advantage. According to a spokesperson, most problems are reported by pet owners who mistakenly administer the products orally. Although oral absorption of the active ingredients in Advantage or Frontline is not harmful, dogs and cats

who ingest either product may salivate profusely, lick their lips, or shake their heads. This is a response to the taste of the ointment in which the drugs are dissolved, and it's the reason the ointment is applied at the base of the skull, where the animal is unlikely to be able to lick it off.

A few animals have reportedly developed skin sensitivity in response to the application of the drugs, a side effect which is also attributed to the ointment, not the active ingredients. These cases have been mild and easily remedied with veterinary care. As with any other drug, care should be taken when using either Advantage or Frontline on debilitated, elderly, pregnant, or nursing animals.

Frontline spray can be used on puppies and kittens starting at 8 weeks of age, and Frontline Top Spot can be used on 10-week-old puppies and 12-week-old kittens. Advantage can be used on puppies and kittens 16 weeks of age and older.

### Sold by Prescription Only

If your shelter is sold on the upside of Frontline and Advantage, then your next step is to address the downside. Frontline and Advantage can be acquired only by veterinari-

In assessing the costs of a switch to one of the new drugs, be sure to compare the drugs' cost with the cost of the your shelter's current flea-control program. Consider the amount spent on the flea-control products you currently use; outlays for safety products required for bathing and dipping (gloves, rubber aprons, goggles or face masks); staff time; and perhaps even the hidden cost of the loss of support your shelter faces after a dissatisfied adopter tells a few friends about the flea-carrying animal she adopted from you. Also think about staff safety: Contact with toxic flea shampoos, dips, and sprays is hazardous, as is flea-bathing a nervous cat.

### A Bonus for Adopters

Finally, if you decide to incorporate Frontline or Advantage into your shelter's flea-control program, be sure to educate adopters about the method of flea control used; these products in many cases will be new to them, too. The manufacturers of both products can supply you with adopter-education materials at no cost.

Fortunately, this last requirement is probably the easiest to satisfy. When the Potter League for Animals

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ans, and both products must be used under their supervision. Not only is this the law, but it's important that the prescribing veterinarian be familiar with the animals you house.

You'll need to discuss an overhaul of your shelter's flea-control regimen with your staff veterinarian or a cooperating veterinarian from your community. He or she can obtain price information on Frontline or Advantage from the manufacturers and help you determine what the bottom line will be.

in Newport, Rhode Island, began using Advantage for flea control on the cats in their adoption area, adopters were advised that a new, non-toxic, highly effective, long-lasting flea-control product had been used on their new companion. According to Cat Care Technician Teri MacKinnon, the adopters have been pleased.

If your shelter decides to use the products, the animals in your facility—and the adopters who take them home—will probably be thankful for either Frontline or Advantage, too. ■