



Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Permethrin: don't put your cat at risk

Cat owner concerns: flea and tick spot-on products

[Spot-ons](#) are commonly used to kill or reduce the numbers of fleas and ticks on pets. Some contain permethrin, a substance that can harm cats, if present in high concentrations. It is very important that you check that the product you are buying is suitable for treating your cat. You must not use on your cat any spot-on that is only meant to be used on dogs. Even if you use only a small part of the pipette or tube on your cat, it could quickly become very unwell and may even die.

[Here](#) you can find information about other types of products with low concentrations of permethrin that can be safely used to treat fleas in cats. Please note that not all products that are authorised are available for sale i.e. you may not be able to find them all in the UK. Also, for some products the company who distributes the product may not be the Marketing Authorisation Holder.

You can buy most spot-on products containing permethrin from pet shops, supermarkets and garden centres. You do not usually get any advice on how to use the product from these types of places. A small number of products are only available from vets or others with special training, who should give you specific advice about using the products.

It is very important that you always read the instructions on veterinary products and follow them carefully.

Dog spot-ons: permethrin

Permethrin flea and tick products for dogs are safe [for dogs](#), if you follow the instructions on the label and packaging carefully. You must be especially careful if you also have a cat in your home.

No significant side-effects in dogs treated with veterinary medicines containing permethrin have been reported.

High levels (for example, more than 50%) of permethrin can be extremely poisonous to cats. A cat exposed to products with high levels, may become very ill, or even die. There are always very strong warnings on these products that they must not be used on cats.

Always pay attention to the warnings on labels. These include

- keep any cats away from a newly treated dog
- prevent cats from licking or grooming a newly treated dog

If you have applied a spot-on product containing permethrin to your cat by mistake:

- immediately wash the product from the cat with water and a mild detergent
- seek immediate treatment for your cat from your vet

- take all the product packaging with you to show to the vet

Fleas: reducing the problem

There are three main types of product that help pet owners deal with fleas.

- Insecticidal products are used on areas where your pet often lays e.g. pet beds, soft furniture and carpets. These household products kill the fleas that your pet brings into your home, and include foggers, powders and sprays. They often contain permethrin. They are regulated by the Health and Safety Executive. You must not use these products to kill the fleas on your pets. Make sure you follow instructions about keeping your pets safe.
- Repellent products are put on your dog or cat. They are meant to repel the fleas. They make no claims about killing the fleas or preventing the fleas from infesting your dog or cat. They may be collars, concentrated liquids (spot-ons or drops), powders, shampoos, mousses or sprays. They do not contain permethrin. These products are also regulated by the Health and Safety Executive.
- Veterinary medicines are put on or given to your dog or cat. They prevent and/or kill fleas. They include collars, shampoos, concentrated liquids (spot-ons or drops), powders and sprays as well as a small number of oral products such as tablets. These products are regulated by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). The VMD must judge each product to be safe to use according to the instructions before it's allowed to be sold. Some veterinary medicines may also be used to prevent or treat infestation with ticks, lice, mites and various worms.

Veterinary medicines: what they are and how they are authorised for sale

A product that says it will prevent flea infestations and/or kill fleas that are already present on a dog and/or cat is a veterinary medicine. That product cannot be sold until the manufacturer of that product has provided information about its safety and effectiveness to the VMD. When the VMD is satisfied that the benefits of the product outweigh any potential risks, the VMD will give the owner a Marketing Authorisation to sell it.

Marketing Authorisations can also be given by the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Once a product is being sold, the VMD or the EMA check that it continues to be safe and does what it says it will do.

Providing you read and follow the instructions, any veterinary medicine you use should be safe and do what it says on the label.

When things go wrong: tell us

In very rare situations a veterinary medicine may not work as expected or a person or an animal may become unwell.

If:

- the animal you have given or put a veterinary medicine on becomes unwell

- another animal that has been near and may have licked the treated animal becomes unwell
- you become unwell
- another person who has touched or been near the treated animal becomes unwell
- you don't think the product has done what you expected it to do

you should either contact the company named on the product label or the VMD. If you are concerned about the health of an animal or person, contact a vet or doctor immediately for advice.

Anyone can report anything unexpected which they have experienced or observed after using a veterinary medicine.

You may be:

- a member of the public
- a vet
- a vet nurse
- a farmer
- a doctor
- a pharmacist
- anyone else who has used a veterinary medicine

You can send a report electronically to the VMD [here](#).

If you have the product's packaging in front of you, you will have all the necessary information to hand, including the batch number.

Pharmaceutical companies are legally required to keep a record of any information they receive about side effects that may have been caused by their products. They must also pass this information to the VMD.

We are aware that there are social media websites, where pet owners discuss problems with many veterinary medicines, including flea products. Unfortunately the information from these websites is often insufficient for us to identify the exact product and assess the case thoroughly. We are also unable to identify and contact those using these sites. We encourage you to tell us about any cases using the link above, so that we receive all the information we need. If we get many reports of problems with particular products, we have the power to make the manufacturers change their products or stop selling them.

Veterinary medicines: Spot-ons

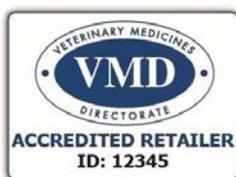
Spot-ons are usually dripped onto the skin at the back of the pet's neck, or between the shoulder blades. A very small amount of liquid which has a strong solution of the medicine in it is put on your pet. Many of the medicines used to prevent flea infestations and/or kill fleas are spot-ons. This is because they are convenient and easy to use.

Places to buy spot-on veterinary medicines

Most veterinary medicines have to be prescribed by and bought from a vet, a pharmacist or a suitably qualified person, who has received specialised training. The person selling the medicine will give you proper advice about the medicine you are buying. Some veterinary medicines can be bought without a prescription from places like supermarkets, pet shops and garden centres. These medicines have been judged to be very safe and no special advice is needed to decide what is wrong with your pet. These medicines are labelled “AVM-GSL” which means they are available for general sales. You are unlikely to get advice on how to use the product that you have bought. That is why it is very important to follow the package instructions.

The internet: buying medicines safely

Many pet owners buy medicines such as spot-on products online. Some websites will sell you ‘medicines’ that have not been checked for safety or effectiveness by the VMD. To reduce the risk of harming your pet by using these products, you are encouraged to buy from websites that the VMD has inspected. These websites display the following logo:



More information can be found [here](#).

Veterinary medicines with permethrin: Spot-ons

Click [here](#) to access a pre-defined search for spot-on products with permethrin to be used only on dogs. They must not be used on cats. Some of these products contain a second substance to make them work against other parasites. Please note that not all products that are authorised are available for sale i.e. you may not be able to find them all in the UK. Also, for some products the company who distributes the product may not be the Marketing Authorisation Holder.

You must not use any of these products on your cat, not even a small part of the pipette or tube. They all have very clear diagrams and instructions not to use on cats. They have warnings that cats could die if the product is used on them. They also include instructions to keep cats from licking treated dogs. Cats that have contact with these products can quickly become unwell.

Permethrin poisoning: what to look for

Your cat may:

- become quieter than usual
- dribble or drool
- shake
- have a fit
- be sick
- stagger and have difficulty walking

- die

Even with very clear warnings on packaging, the VMD receives a few reports each year after a dog permethrin spot-on has been used accidentally on a cat. Sometimes this has led to cats dying.

Number of cats affected

Each year, the VMD publishes an annual report about side effects of veterinary medicines in the Veterinary Record. This report includes the number of cats affected after the use of dog spot-ons containing permethrin. In 2013 we were told about 24 cases, which is a slight increase on the 16 received in 2012. The number of dog doses sold for each cat case that we have been told about has generally been increasing over recent years. This means that overall, when compared to the number of doses sold the number of cats affected is generally decreasing.

Year	Number of dog doses sold for each cat report received	Number of dog doses sold for each cat death reported
2006	48,000	416,000
2007	65,000	269,000
2008	79,000	475,000
2009	75,500	216,500
2010	107,000	589,000
2011	119,000	302,000
2012	162,000	287,500
2013	135,000	473,500

Veterinary medicines with permethrin: Other types

There are also collars, powders, sprays and shampoos which have permethrin in them. You can use some of these on your cat. If a product is labelled to say it can be used on cats then it will be safe to use on your cat providing the instructions are followed correctly.

For these products, we only receive one report of a side effect in the animal being treated for every 75,000 sold. Similarly, on average we have only received one report of death for every 2.2 million doses sold. Most of these products are collars. The most common side effects reported are hair loss and skin reactions around the neck of the animal.

Click [here](#) to access a pre-defined search for products authorised as veterinary medicines which contain permethrin and are safe to use on cats, providing the instructions are followed correctly.

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