

# Lice

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Lice are a species specific ectoparasite, meaning that they are a parasite that can not survive on a host other than the one it is meant to be on. There are two types of lice that can infest dogs, *Trichodectes canis* which is the canine chewing louse and *Linognathus setosus* which is the canine sucking louse. One type of lice affects cats, *Felicola subrostratus*, also known as the feline chewing louse. Lice infestations are more common in very young, old, or debilitated animals as well animals that are housed in unsanitary environments. The chewing louse for both dogs and cats is fairly common throughout the entire world while infestations of the dog sucking louse occur more frequently in colder climates.



Sucking Louse



Chewing Lice

The head shape for each of the two types of lice reflect the differences in their feeding habits. The chewing louse grasps the hosts hair with large mandibles that result in a wide head. The sucking louse has a narrow head because the mouth parts are designed to suck blood or fluids, like a mosquito. Sucking lice also have more developed claws for grasping the hosts hair. Lice of either species are flat, do not have wings, and have three pairs of legs. Lice are small, but visible to the naked eye.

Lice cause little irritation except in cases of high infestation. It typically does not occur on kennel reared dogs except under conditions that are unsatisfactory in many other ways as well. The canine sucking louse is more commonly found in longer haired dogs. The chewing louse of the dog is an intermediate host for the canine tapeworm.

A female louse lays several eggs daily throughout her roughly 30 day life. Eggs, also known as nits, are cemented to the hair follicle near the base and hatch in 1 to 2 weeks. After the nits hatch they go through 3 different developmental phases before maturing into adult lice in 2 to 3 weeks. The complete life cycle of a louse (from egg to laying eggs) is roughly 3 to 6 weeks. Adult lice are 1 to 1.25 millimeters in length and are yellowish to tan in color with dark markings.

If the pet is experiencing a heavy infestation they can become extremely itchy, restless, have a ruffled or rough matted coat and have areas of hair loss. The most common ways for dogs or cats to become infected with their respective lice is through direct contact with an animal that has lice or through inanimate objects such as grooming tools that have eggs on them.

Once your veterinarian has made the diagnosis that your pet has lice the treatments used are typically topical products such as Frontline® or Revolution®. If the coat is matted, it may be beneficial to shave either the matted areas or the entire animal. Treatment may need to be repeated every other week. Once your pet is treated they should stay in a clean

environment. The eggs (and other stages) will die gradually over time as they dry out. This process can be sped up if bedding items are placed in the dryer for several hours. To prevent an infestation new pets should be examined and treated if necessary and infested pets should be kept separate from other pets within the household.

For more information contact Cedar Grove Veterinary Services at (920) 668- 6212 or [info@cgvvet.com](mailto:info@cgvvet.com). You can also find out more at [www.capcvet.org](http://www.capcvet.org).