

### Construct your electronic library on pig health

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## Introduction

Fleas generally have a low degree of host specificity and a species of flea can parasitise a range of mammals and/or birds. Their ability to move between hosts means that fleas can be important in disease transmission.

## Species

The four fleas commonly associated with pigs are *Pulex irritans* (the human flea), *Echidnophaga gallinacea* (the sticktight flea), *Ctenocephalides felis* (the cat flea) and *Tunga penetrans* (the sand flea).

*Tunga penetrans* is different from most fleas in that it is very small and burrows into the host's skin where it remains for life.

## Life cycle

All fleas have a similar life cycle. Only the adult feeds on blood and is the only stage in the life cycle to be found on the pig. Following mating the female flea lays eggs which fall off the pig into the environment. The larvae hatch 2-16 days later. A couple of days later the flea larvae pupate. Pupation can last for 18 days up to a year. The adult flea can wait weeks/months for a suitable host.

## Diagnosis

Diagnosis can be difficult unless adult fleas are actually found on the host as the other stages are to be found in the environment. Flea bites can be difficult to differentiate from other insect bites.

## Treatment

Fleas can be treated with many of the products used to treat other ectoparasites. However, the stages in the environment are much harder to treat and involves bedding removal and burning.