

DOG & CAT HEARTWORM FACTS

- **Dog and cat heartworm** disease is a serious and potentially fatal condition
- Only mosquitoes can transmit heartworms from one animal to another.
- Heartworms are a parasitic worm that look like 6-14" long thin spaghetti.
- Adult heartworms live in the right ventricle of the heart and nearby blood vessels.
- An infected dog may have several hundred heartworms challenging blood circulation and damaging the heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys.
- Serious damage may occur before signs are detected by the owner.
- Advanced signs include difficulty breathing, coughing, tiring easily, listlessness, weight loss and fainting.
- Heartworms may infect many species of animals including dogs, cats, coyotes, fox, wolves, ferrets, sea lions, and other wild canines and felines.
- The average lifespan of heartworms in untreated pets is 5-7 years in dogs and 2-3 years in cats.
- Virtually 100% of dogs exposed to infective microfilaria (heartworm larvae) become infected; in cats, this number drops to 61% to 90%.
- Heartworm infection in cats exists everywhere heartworm in dogs exists.
- A study performed at North Carolina State University indicated that 25% of cats infected with heartworms were solely indoor cats.
- Heartworms affect cats differently than dogs, but the disease they cause is equally as serious.
- The American Heartworm Society (AHS) estimates that only 55% of dogs in the U.S. are currently on a heartworm preventive, leaving 27 million dogs at risk of acquiring heartworm disease.
- **Dog and cat heartworm** prevention is far more effective and less costly than treatment.
- Research suggests that the disease could be virtually eradicated using available **dog and cat heartworm** preventives.
- Heartworm is diagnosed with blood tests, and/or X-rays, along with other tests.
- Heartworms are not detectable with the commonly used antigen blood test until they are sexually mature (about 6 months after entering the patient). Female worms must be present for accurate test results.
- Heartworms exist throughout the United States and Canada. In most areas of the country Heartworm is an important pet health care issue.
- Puppies should be started on monthly dog heartworm preventative by 8 weeks of age and then blood tested at 7 months of age.
- Dogs over 7 months of age should be tested before starting heartworm preventatives.
- Dogs should be tested on a regular basis, yearly if any doses of preventative have been missed and once every 2 years even if no doses were missed and preventative is given year around.
- The safest way to be assured of **dog and cat heartworm** prevention is to have your pet on monthly heartworm preventative and to test every year.
- In the cat, the presence of heartworm is difficult to detect with a blood test alone. Preventative medication is often started without testing unless signs of a heartworm infection are noticed.



- In cats, one adult heartworm can cause sudden death or acute respiratory signs that are indistinguishable from asthma without a medical work up.
- The rate of cat heartworm diagnosis varies by geographic area. As veterinarians continue to improve diagnostic techniques in cats, it is suspected there will be less variation from the canine incidence rate in the same area.
- Until the last few years, it was thought that cat heartworm disease was so rare that prevention was not needed in cats. This view is changing as we learn that many cat heartworm infections are overlooked since feline heartworm disease does not commonly present with the same symptoms as dogs and the signs and symptoms look and act like other cat diseases.

HOW MOSQUITOES SPREAD HEARTWORMS

- 1) Mosquito bites an animal infected with heartworm, ingesting the microfilaria
- 2) Mosquito then bites another animal, infecting that animal's blood with microfilaria
- 3) In 3 to 6 months the microfilaria mature into adult heartworms which begin to reproduce additional microfilaria

For the latest on **dog and cat heartworm** disease, visit <http://heartwormsociety.org> or see <http://animartpetstores.com/store/Heartworm/> for heartworm preventatives for your pet.



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