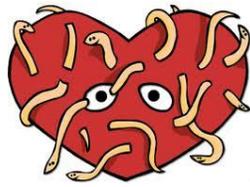


# *Seneca Veterinary News*



## **Heartworm Disease**

### **What are Heartworms?**

Heartworms are parasites that live in the heart and lungs of infected pets. If left untreated, the heartworms will multiply and block blood flow through the heart. Heartworm disease has been recorded in all 50 states, although it is more common in the south. Heartworm disease is becoming more prevalent in northern regions due to people moving for jobs and because of natural disasters.

### **Symptoms of Heartworm Disease.**

Pets that have heartworms usually do not show signs until the disease becomes severe. Some signs of the disease include tiredness, coughing, loss of appetite, weight loss and difficulty breathing.

### **Who can get heartworms?**

Dogs typically are the ones that get heartworms. It has been seen in over 30 types of mammals, including cats. In rare cases, where mosquitos are prevalent year round, humans have gotten heartworms.

### **How are heartworms transmitted?**

Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitos.

An adult heartworm releases her young into the bloodstream of an infected pet. The young worms are called microfilaria. The mosquito picks up the microfilaria when it bites the infected pet. The microfilaria grows inside the mosquito to the larval stage. The mosquito transmits the larva stage of heartworm when it bites its next animal. From here it takes the larva stage 6 months to grow into an adult heartworm.

Heartworms are not passed directly from pet to pet. A mosquito must carry it from one pet to another.

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## **Diagnosing Heartworm Disease.**

Blood tests are available to detect heartworms. Unfortunately the test only detects the presence of adult heartworms. X-rays are also done along with the blood test. Heartworms often cause enlargement of arteries surrounding the heart. It may also cause the right side of the heart to enlarge. Inflammation in the lungs is also often seen.

## **Treating Heartworm Disease.**

A medication can be given that kills the adult heartworms. Strict exercise restriction is required while a dog is being treated for heartworms. As the heartworms die, they can cause blockages in the arteries leading from the heart to the lungs. They can also block blood vessels in the lungs. Another medication is also given that kills the microfilaria in the bloodstream. It takes four to six weeks to completely kill the heartworms. A heartworm test should be performed six months after treatment to insure all heartworms have been killed.

## **Preventing Heartworm Disease.**

Preventing Heartworm disease is cheaper, easier and safer than treating it. Heartworm preventatives kill microfilaria before it can become an adult worm. Animals less than 6 months old can be put right on the preventative since it takes over 6 months to go from the larval stage to an adult worm. Animals over 6 months old must first have a blood test to make sure heartworm is not present. The preventative we currently use is Heartgard. It not only prevents heartworms but also treats for roundworms and hookworms. These are intestinal worms commonly found pets. We recommend keeping pets on heartworm preventative year round. If a pet misses a month of the preventative, they should be retested before being put back on the medication. Even while on the medication all year, a heartworm test should still be performed every three years.

*THE MEDICATION THAT TREATS HEARTWORMS IS  
CURRENTLY NOT AVAILABLE.*