

Hearthworm disease is transmitted to pets via mosquitoes.

These worms develop and lodge in an infected pet's heart and pulmonary artery, where they can cause illness and even death.



What you need to know about heartworm disease:

- **It can be fatal to both dogs and cats.**
Although more common in dogs, heartworms are more deadly to cats.
- **The disease is virtually 100% preventable.**
Today, there are safe, effective, and easy-to-administer heartworm preventive medicines. Why leave your pet at risk for this dangerous problem?
- **Heartworms are everywhere.**
All pets need protection, as infestations have been reported in all 50 states.
- **Spring is most dangerous.**
Mosquito carriers are most plentiful in spring and summer. But the disease can be spread any time of year.

Q & A

When should my pet be tested for heartworms?

If your pet shows any of the symptoms of heartworm infection (see the list inside), he or she should be tested immediately. We also recommend that adult pets be tested prior to starting on heartworm preventive medication, and as part of their annual exams.

Why does my pet need heartworm medicine in winter when mosquitoes are dormant?

Mosquitoes can survive over the winter in basements, garages, and sheds. Mosquitoes become active once temperatures regularly rise above the freezing point. Remember, one bite can infect your pet! And these medications help prevent other types of parasites, as well.

How long has heartworm disease been around?

Heartworms have been infecting dogs since the 1600s, when an Italian researcher first reported seeing them in a greyhound. The first case of heartworms in a cat was diagnosed in 1921.

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Heartworm Disease

Protecting your pet from this dangerous infection



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Heartworm Disease



Potentially deadly...

Before veterinarians had effective medications to prescribe, many animals died from heartworm disease. Today, however, it is virtually 100% preventable, as long as preventive medication is given as directed.

That's the good news. The bad news: although once confined mainly to the South and Southeast, heartworms are now considered a potential problem in all 50 states.

How heartworms hurt

In dogs, the worms live in the heart and large blood vessels around the heart and lungs, where they can damage tissues and lead to heart failure and pulmonary disease. In some cases, the worms can obstruct other large blood vessels, leading to liver failure and kidney disease. Severe cases can be fatal.

In cats, the worms are found in the heart, lungs or a pulmonary artery. While cats are less susceptible to heartworm infection than dogs, their body's reaction to the worms can be more intense. Feline patients can become severely ill or even die suddenly from just one or two worms.

One bite can infect your pet

Heartworm disease is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito carrying the microscopic heartworm larvae.

Mosquitoes become carriers by biting an already infected animal and then subsequently biting other healthy ones. As a result, heartworm disease is a problem virtually everywhere there are mosquitoes.

Easily preventable

Step #1: Get your dog and cat tested

A simple blood test can detect whether or not your pet has been exposed to heartworm infection. Additional diagnostic tests that may be used to determine the extent of heartworm infection include radiography and ultrasound.

Step #2: Start them on preventive medicine

Depending on your individual pet and personal preferences, your veterinarian will recommend either monthly oral or topical or twice yearly injectable heartworm preventive medication.

Many of these medications also control other internal parasites, such as roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms.

In most cases, your veterinarian will recommend that your pet be treated year round.

How to treat infected pets

Dogs

Newer, safer products have become available in recent years that are very effective in getting rid of

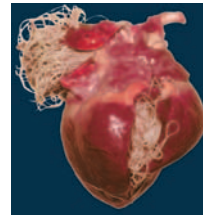


Illustration of an infested heart.

Signs of heartworms in dogs:

- Deep chest cough
- L labored respiration
- Fatigue and lethargy
- Weight loss
- Abdominal distension or bloating

Signs of heartworms in cats:

- Coughing and/or gagging
- Vomiting
- Breathing problems
- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Sudden death

Note: In some dogs and cats with heartworm infection, there may be no clinical abnormalities whatsoever. This is why periodic screening is so important. Many cats that die suddenly from heartworm disease have been seemingly healthy up until the time of death.

the infection. The treatment can produce some side effects, however.

A thorough physical examination and battery of diagnostic tests will be needed to determine how extensive the infection is, as well as whether the medication used to kill the heartworms can safely be administered to your dog.

Cats

It is very difficult to treat a cat infected with heartworms because of the serious side effects caused by the therapy. Blood clots and fluid in the lungs are two common complications.

Instead, treatment in cats is generally limited to supportive care (steroids, rest, and oxygen therapy if there is significant breathing difficulty) designed to help your cat cope with the disease. Some cases do resolve on their own.

VCA Pet Tip:

Outdoor pets have a higher risk of developing an infection, but indoor dogs and cats can become infected as well. Mosquitoes can easily gain access to a home through open windows, doors, or cracks. In several studies, one-third of infected cats were indoor cats only!