

Pawsitive Press

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Heartworm Disease and Prevention

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My waist size and hair color are not the only things that have changed a lot in 30 years of practice. Heartworm disease is a common disease of dogs and cats and it has changed dramatically over the years. Years ago we knew heartworms were a big problem in dogs and felt that cats rarely, if ever, got the disease. Heartworms are carried by mosquitos. These parasites can infect both dogs and cats. If left untreated it can be fatal. In dogs, the clinical signs may be coughing, weight loss, decreased muscle mass, decreased appetite, decreased stamina, heart failure, and ascites (fluid accumulation in the abdomen). Frequently both dogs and cats may be infected with the disease without showing clinical signs until the heart and lungs have been severely damaged.

In dogs, we diagnosed the disease by looking at a few drops of fresh blood and looking for the microfilaria (babies) wiggling like crazy but not going anywhere. There was another parasite that looked the same under the microscope but did not



cause any problems for dogs named Diepetalonemia. They actually moved from one end of the slide to the other.

Luckily, testing for heartworm disease has improved drastically over the years and we now have an ELISA (enzyme linked immune absorbance) test that is run in the hospital and is very accurate. The lab that we purchase the tests from will even run a more accurate and much more expensive test for free if we have a questionable result with the in-house test. Previously, dogs had to be checked for the babies before starting them on the daily medication, yes DAILY medication. Many dogs would have an allergic reaction with the medicine if they baby heartworms in their system and deaths had been reported. Now fast forward to the time of texting and e-mail and much better prevention of heartworm disease for pets. There are many new, safer heartworm preventions out now and

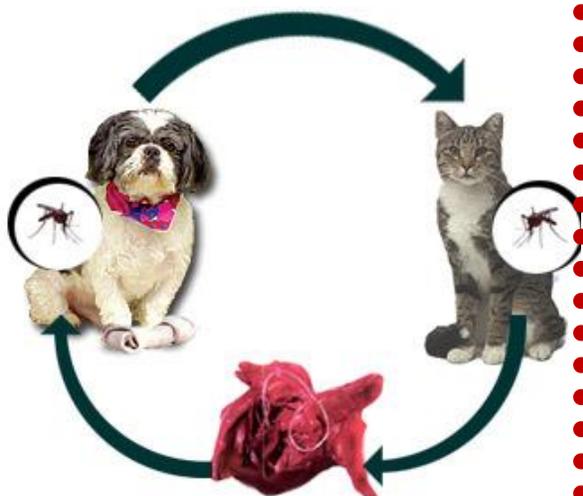
all of them are monthly medications. For dogs we have topical preparations, like Advantage Multi, which are applied directly to the skin between the shoulders every month. There are also chewable, oral medications available for dogs and they seem to really enjoy getting their monthly treat. Newer medications, such as TriFexis, even have flea prevention in them so they are really two medications in one!

The last fifteen years has revealed that cats get heartworm disease much more frequently than previously thought. Often when cats are first infected, they will develop a cough that may last several weeks. After that there may be no symptoms until the worms damage the heart or cause thrombi (blood clots) to form. These thrombi can create problems in many organs and cause the heart to fail. Cats need to be on prevention as well. With cats there was really no way to diagnose the disease but with new testing, like ELISA, more and more cats are being accurately diagnosed with the disease. With the increase of diagnosed cats, there has also been an increase in Feline Heartworm preventions, which were non-existent just a few years back. Ask any owner who



has had to pill a cat that simply applying a topical liquid on their back is much easier and less stressful for both parties involved.

With the ease of diagnosing and treating heartworm disease that we have now, there is really no reason for a pet to get sick and possibly die with heartworm disease. The hardest part of using the preventions available today maybe just remembering to give the medication the same day every month. However, most companies will send you an e-mail reminder or provide stickers for your calendar to help with remembering. Call the office to speak with veterinarian today about how easy and cost effective it really is to prevent heartworm disease in your furry companion.



What if My Cat Tests Positive for Heartworm?

While many pet owners think heartworm disease only happens to dogs, cats are just as likely to be infected by mosquitoes. These infections are serious — and sometimes fatal — in both dogs and cats, but there are differences in the nature of the disease and in how it's diagnosed and managed. Because a cat is not an ideal host for heartworms, some infections resolve on their own, although these infections can leave cats with respiratory system damage. Heartworms in the circulatory system also affect the cat's immune system and cause symptoms such as coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing. Heartworms in cats may even migrate to other parts of the body, such as the brain, eye and spinal cord. Severe complications such as blood clots in the lungs and lung inflammation can result when the adult worms die in the cat's body.

Diagnosing and managing heartworm disease in cats

While infected dogs may have 30 or more worms in their heart and lungs, cats usually have six or fewer — and may have just one or two. But while the severity of heartworm disease in dogs is related to the number of worms, in cats, just one or two worms can make a cat very ill. Diagnosis can be complicated, requiring a physical exam, an X-ray, a complete blood count, and several kinds of blood tests. An ultrasound may also be performed. Unfortunately, there is no approved drug therapy for heartworm infection in cats, and the drug used to treat infections in dogs is not safe for cats. Nevertheless, cats with heartworm disease can often be helped with good veterinary care. The goal is to stabilize your cat and determine a long-term management plan.

Here's the plan of action you should expect if your cat tests positive for heartworm:

Monitor your cat

Heartworm-positive cats may experience spontaneous clearing of heartworms. If your cat is not showing signs of respiratory distress, but worms have been detected in the lungs, chest X-rays every six to twelve months may be recommended. If mild symptoms are noted, small doses of prednisone may be administered to help reduce inflammation.

Provide veterinary care

If the disease is severe, additional support may be necessary. Your veterinarian may recommend hospitalization in order to provide therapy, such as intravenous fluids, drugs to treat lung and heart symptoms, antibiotics, and general nursing care. In some cases, surgical removal of heartworms may be possible.

Maintain prevention

A cat that has developed heartworm disease has demonstrated that it is susceptible to heartworm infection, and both outdoor and indoor cats are at risk. It's important to give your cat monthly heartworm preventives, which are available in both spot-on and pill form. Preventives keep new infections from developing if an infected mosquito bites your cat again. As a bonus, some preventives also protect cats against other parasites that can affect their health.

Heartworm disease is serious in cats, but many cases can be managed with good veterinary and home care. Meanwhile, healthy cats should be kept healthy with year-round heartworm prevention.

Confused about which Heartworm Prevention is best for your pet?

Here is a side by side comparison of the most popular preventions on the market today!

Product Name	Advantage Multi	Heartgard	Revolution*	Sentinel*	Trifexis
Species:					
Dogs	X	X	X	X	X
Cats	X	X	X		
Frequency	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly
Minimum Age:					
Dog	7 weeks	6 weeks	6 weeks	4 weeks	8 weeks
Cat	9 weeks	6 weeks	8 weeks		
Fleas	X		X	X	X
Mites:					
Sarcoptic			X Dogs		
Ear	X Cats		X		
Heartworms	X		X		X
Hookworms	X	X	X Cats	X	X
Roundworms	X	X	X Cats	X	X
Whipworms	X Dogs			X	X
Active Ingredient	Imidacloprid/ Moxidectin	Ivermectin	Selamectin	Milbemycin Oxime/ Lufenuron	Spinosad/ Milbemycin Oxime
Manufacturer	Bayer	Merial	Pfizer	Novartis	Elanco

*This product is not carried in our hospital

FAQ's

How do monthly heartworm preventives work?

ANSWER Whether the prevention you choose is given orally, topically, or by injection, all approved heartworm medications work by eliminating the immature (larval) stages of this parasite. This includes the infective heartworm larvae deposited by the mosquito as well as the molted fourth larval stage which develops inside the animal. Unfortunately, within 2 months, immature heartworm larvae can molt into an adult (fifth) stage, which cannot be effectively eliminated by preventives. Because heartworms must be eliminated before they reach this adult stage, it is extremely important that heartworm preventives be administered strictly on schedule (monthly for oral and topical products and every 6 months for the injectable). Administering prevention late can allow immature larvae to molt into the adult stage, which is poorly prevented.

Why do dogs need to be blood tested before starting heartworm medication?

ANSWER Preventive medications can be harmful or even fatal to a dog that has an adult heartworm infection, so it is very important that all dogs be tested before starting a preventive program.

What are the dangers? Adult heartworms reproduce by releasing millions of microscopic “babies” (called microfilaria) into a dog’s bloodstream. When we give a preventive medication, these microfilariae can suddenly die and a shock-type reaction can occur. This reaction can be triggered within a matter of minutes or hours and without prompt veterinary attention, death can occur.

But even if an infected dog does not have an immediate “reaction” to preventive medication, the pet often remains infected for several years. As long as adult worms remain, they will continue to cause progressive disease of the heart, lungs, and pulmonary arteries which can lead to irreversible life-threatening problems.

Giving heartworm prevention to an infected pet can mislead an owner into believing everything is all right, while within the pet, heartworm disease is worsening.

How often should I have my dog tested for heartworm infection?

ANSWER All dogs should be tested for heartworms every 12 months. This usually takes place during a pet’s annual visit for routine preventive care and is your insurance policy against what could turn out to be a serious illness.

Nothing is perfect. People miss doses of medication or fail to give it the same day each and every month. Pets vomit frequently and at times “lose” their dose of prevention. Heartworm preventives are “nearly” perfect, but nothing is perfect and the danger of not testing is in not knowing.

If you administer heartworm prevention to your pet as scheduled, the chance of your pet developing an infection is extremely low. Your veterinarian’s job, however, is to ensure your pet’s good health by detecting problems before they progress into serious issues. Heartworm disease is a serious issue and when present, should be detected and treated as soon as possible. Testing annually is important.

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2 Months Free Advantage Multi

Limited Time Offer

Buy one 6 pack of advantage multi and get 2 months same size free. May not be combined with any other offer. Coupon must be presented at the time of purchase only at the Animal Hospital of Dunedin. Expires 3/31/14

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\$12 Mail in Rebate

Any Size Heartgard

Purchase 12 months of any size Heartgard Plus and receive a \$12 mail-in rebate. The rebate form will be filled out and mailed in by our staff and Merial will mail a check directly to your home. By law, pets must have been seen in our office within the last 12 months and should have a negative heartworm test. Expires: 3/31/14

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Animal Hospital OF DUNEDIN
Caring for Pets with Love and Kindness

\$10/\$25 Mail in Rebate

Any Size Trifexis

Purchase 6 months and receive a \$10 mail-in rebate. Purchase 12 months of Trifexis and receive a \$25 mail in rebate. The rebate form will be filled out and mailed in by our staff and Elanco will mail a check directly to your home. By law, pets must have been seen in our office within the last 12 months and should have a negative heartworm test. Expires: 3/31/14

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