

# Pawsitive Press

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**Related Webpages:**



[Heartworm Myths and Facts](#)

## Heartworm Basics

By: Wade Matthews, D.V.M.

Most people are well aware of their own high blood pressure or, hypertension, if they have it. This is not a health problem that people feel on their own; a doctor must diagnose it with specific tests to check for it. Heartworm disease in dogs must be diagnosed the same way with specific tests. It is caused by a worm which actually lives in the heart and is about the same size as spaghetti. These are the adult worms and they cause damage by creating pulmonary hypertension, increased blood pressure in the lung. The body's immune system does not like the parasites and it tries to get rid of them and that causes a change in the walls of the blood vessels. Pets get heartworm disease by getting bit by a mosquito which has fed off another dog that has heartworms.

### What can I do to prevent my pet from getting heartworms?

All dogs in Florida should be on heartworm prevention year round. We are fortunate to have a sub-tropical climate and it is never cold enough long enough to kill our mosquito population. All heartworm prevention manufacturers recommend that pets be checked for



heartworms by a blood test on a yearly basis. There are topical preventives which are applied to the skin and there are oral medications both of which are given monthly. Both topical and oral heartworm medications are available in combination with flea and tick medications for your convenience.

### My dog has been diagnosed with heartworm disease, what can be done?

There is only one approved medication to treat the adult heartworm, Immiticide. It is an arsenic derivative and is given by injection. Your veterinarian will take x-rays of your dog's chest and perform some lab work to help insure your pet is healthy enough to proceed with treatment. Usually your pet's treatment with the medication that kills adult worms, Immiticide, is preceded with oral medications. These are prednisone and doxycycline. These medications help to kill some heartworms and make the remaining worms more susceptible

to Immiticide. The American Heartworm Society recommends all dogs with heartworm disease receive 3 injections of Immiticide. The first injection is given and 30 days later the second injection is given. The third injection is given 24 hours after the second. There are some agencies that will use the "slow kill" way to treat adult heartworms. Most veterinary cardiologists do not recommend this technique, because it is not very effective at killing adult heartworms and while the adult worms are in the heart pulmonary vessels are being ruined by hypertension and these changes do not go away even if the worms are killed. For more information on treatment protocols and timelines go to:

<https://www.heartwormsociety.org/veterinary-resources/american-heartworm-society-guidelines>

### What are the side effects of treatment?

Most dogs will do well with treatment, especially when combined with the oral medications described above. There are some risks associated with treatment. None of these risks are as dangerous as leaving the disease untreated over a long period of time. The first is pain or infection as the injection site. This occurs rarely and if it occurs treatment is highly effective with excellent outcomes. The

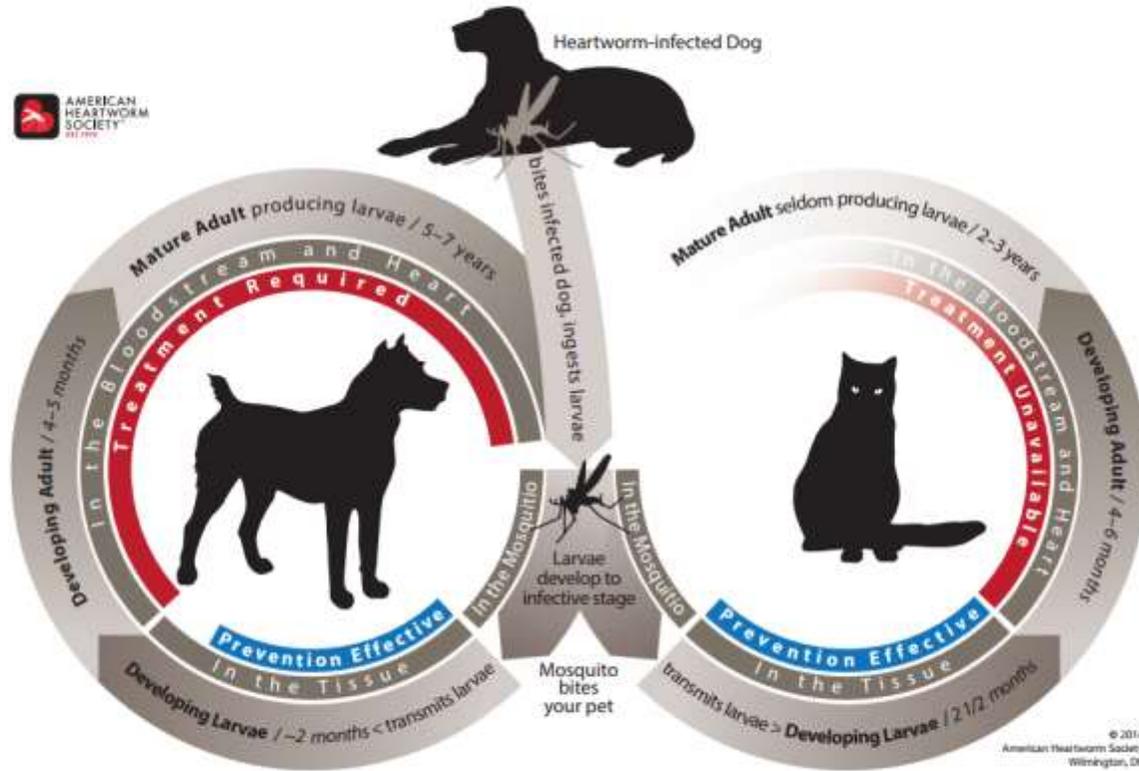
second is a risk of dying worms breaking loose in the blood vessels and forming an obstruction like a clot. This occurs infrequently with the use of the oral medications administered before the Immiticide injections but is a possibility. It is the risk of this thrombus (clot-like structure) that makes exercise restriction from the first Immiticide injection to 30 days after the last injection a **MUST**. If this occurs it is treatable and treatment outcomes are very good in healthy pets.

**What about my cat and heartworms?**

Cats do not get heartworm disease as easily as dogs, however when they get it they can have an acute death situation due to how their immune system works with the parasite. The University of Florida recommends that all cats be on heartworm prevention. There are specific heartworm preventions for cats.

Treatment for heartworm disease is expensive for owners and hard on pets, so the best and most efficient way is to put them on prevention to avoid the problem.

# Heartworm Life Cycle



# The Mighty Mosquito



## She's TOUGH



Survives and thrives in a variety of climates and environments.

## She's MOBILE

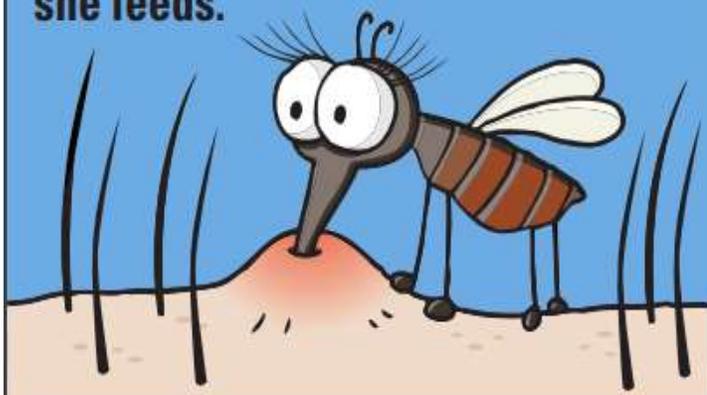


Lives indoors and outdoors. Willing to relocate.

Heartworms spread when a mosquito carrying larvae bites your unprotected pet.

## She's HUNGRY

Drinks 3x her weight in blood, spreading heartworm larvae as she feeds.



## She's SNEAKY

Mosquito "season" is impossible to predict. Protect your pets from heartworms year-round.



**PROTECT YOUR PET FROM HEARTWORM 12 MONTHS A YEAR.**  
**TEST FOR HEARTWORM EVERY 12 MONTHS.** [heartwormsociety.org](http://heartwormsociety.org)

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[www.ahofd.com](http://www.ahofd.com)



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**\$1**

## First Exam - New Patient

(\$49-\$80 Savings)

Includes comprehensive physical exam and one vaccine. Does not include 3yr Rabies vaccine. Must be presented at the time of purchase. Coupon may not be combined with any other offer. NL



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**-10%**

## 10% Off Dental Cleaning

( Call for an appointment today 727-733-9351)

Discount applies to anesthesia, prophylaxis, and any other dental radiographs or extractions that might be needed. Offer excludes required pre-dental labwork. May not be combined with any other coupons or discounts. Must be presented at the time of purchase.

Expires 4/30/16 NL



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## \$5 Bath/Exam/Nail Trim

Call to schedule a full medical exam, bath, and nail trim. Bathing will include shampooing, ear cleaning, nail trim, warm air drying and brush out. Coupon must be presented at the time of purchase. Coupon may not be combined with any other offer. **\*\*\*NEW PATIENTS ONLY\*\*\***

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**\$120**

## Senior Wellness Screen

Senior Wellness Screen includes the following: Chemistry, CBC, Heartworm Test, Thyroid Level, Urinalysis, and Microalbuminuria (for cats a leukemia and FIV test is also included). Call the office to schedule your pets visit today. May not be combined with any other offer. Coupon must be presented at the time of purchase. Expires 4/30/16 NL