

The Importance of Heartworm Preventatives.

Practicing monthly prevention can help **reduce your pet's risk of infection**. In addition, some heartworm preventatives may also protect against other worms such as roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms. See individual product package for full details.

Heartworm Prevention for Dogs

Heartworm prevention for dogs is an important concern for every pet owner. Prevention is an important part of providing essential care, and heartworm disease prevention for dogs is something every owner can do. Consider this:

- Dogs have been diagnosed with heartworm disease in every state in the U.S.
- Heartworms are spread by mosquitoes, so any area of the country that has mosquitoes—even just a few of them—can also have heartworm disease.
- Dogs don't just need prevention during warm-weather months. Heartworm preventives work by treating heartworms that already infected the pet within the past month or longer; meanwhile, preventives need to be given on time, every time to be effective. That's why the American Heartworm Society recommends year-round heartworm prevention for pets.
- The American Heartworm Society estimates that more than a million dogs in the U.S. have heartworm disease—and heartworm disease can be fatal.
- Cats and ferrets can also get heartworm disease.
- Heartworm preventives are safe, relatively inexpensive and easy to give, but if a dog becomes infected, heartworm treatment can be costly and difficult, requiring multiple veterinary visits and months of exercise restriction.
- While there are drug-free strategies owners can put in place to reduce a pet's exposure to mosquitoes, there's no such thing as a "natural" heartworm preventives.

Heartworm preventives come in different forms, including monthly chewable pills and topical "spot on" medications, as well as an injectable medication that is given every 6 or 12 months. Heartworm preventives are available only by prescription from veterinarians.

Some preventives only prevent heartworms, some protect pets from heartworms and intestinal parasites, and some protect pets from many different parasites, including heartworms, intestinal worms, fleas, ticks and mites. Because veterinarians know which parasites are common in the area in which they practice, owners should talk to their pet's doctor about what product or products will be best for their pets.

The Importance of Heartworm Prevention

What to know about heartworm disease.

Heartworm disease is a serious disease that affects both cats and dogs. It is caused by foot-long worms that settle into the heart, blood vessels, and lungs of an affected pet. These types of worms can cause heart failure and lung disease and can be potentially deadly if not caught in time. Pets that survive heartworm disease often have a lower quality of life because of the damage to their organs. As April is Heartworm Awareness Month, it is important to educate yourself on what heartworm disease is and why heartworm prevention is vital to your pet's wellbeing.

What is heartworm?

Heartworm is a type of roundworm known as dirofilariasis (or heartworm disease). The parasite that causes the disease is known as *Dirofilaria immitis*. It takes 6 – 7 months for larvae to mature to adulthood where it begins the reproduction cycle. A single adult heartworm can reach up to 12 inches in length and live up to seven years.

How do pets get heartworms?

Mosquitoes are the most common carrier of heartworm. A female mosquito picks up larvae in the bloodstream of an infected animal, then transmits the larvae into the next animal it bites. Dogs are a perfect host for heartworms which is why they are most affected by the parasite, but cats can also become hosts.

Heartworm larvae take about 6 months to develop into adult worms that settle into the organs of the animal. Once the worms take hold, the adults can live and produce larvae for 5-7 years in dogs and 2-3 years in cats.

Signs of heartworm in dogs

During the initial stages of the infection, signs of heartworm are almost impossible to detect in dogs. Your dog will act normal until the larvae have matured a few months after infection, however, they are causing damage to your pet's health even before symptoms occur. Signs of infection include:

- Coughing
- Easily fatigued
- Lethargic
- Lack of interest in play or exercise
- Decreased appetite
- Weight loss

As the infection advances, your dog may develop heart failure and have a swollen belly from the excess fluid that the heart cannot pump out. A dog that has a large number of heartworms in its organs can exhibit Caval Syndrome which is caused by the heartworms suddenly blocking blood flow.



Note: Sources University of Veterinary at Berkeley and American Heartworm Society