



Heartworm in Canines



AAECP follows the American Heartworm Society protocols for prevention and treatment of Heartworm in Canines. This protocol has changed as of 2015 meaning we REQUIRE yearly heartworm testing for dogs, and additional testing for puppies and dogs that have missed doses of preventative.

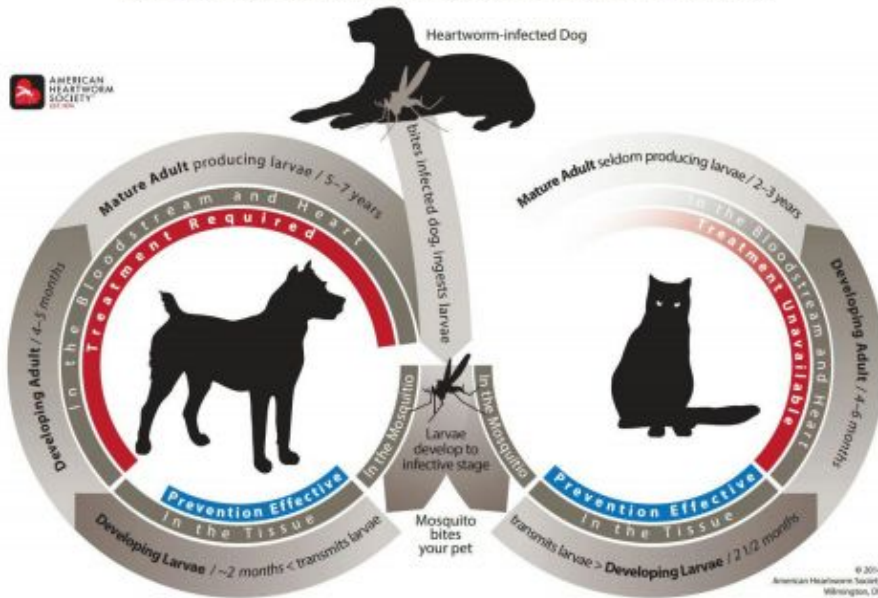


What is heartworm disease in dogs?

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease in pets in the United States and many other parts of the world. It is caused by foot-long worms (heartworms) that live in the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels of affected pets, causing severe lung disease, heart failure and damage to other organs in the body.

The dog is a natural host for heartworms, which means that heartworms that live inside the dog mature into adults, mate and produce offspring. If untreated, their numbers can increase, and dogs have been known to harbor several hundred worms in their bodies. Heartworm disease causes lasting damage to the heart, lungs and arteries, and can affect the dog's health and quality of life long after the parasites are gone. For this reason, prevention is by far the best option, and treatment—when needed—should be administered as early in the course of the disease as possible.

How is heartworm disease transmitted from one pet to another?



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How is heartworm disease transmitted from one pet to another?

The mosquito plays an essential role in the heartworm life cycle. Adult female heartworms living in an infected dog, fox, coyote, or wolf produce microscopic baby worms called microfilaria that circulate in the bloodstream. When a mosquito bites and takes a blood meal from an infected animal, it picks up these baby worms, which develop and mature into "infective stage" larvae over a period of 10 to 14 days. Then, when the infected mosquito bites another dog, cat, or susceptible wild animal, the infective larvae are deposited onto the surface of the animal's skin and enter the new host through the mosquito's bite wound. Once inside a new host, it takes approximately 6 months for the larvae to mature into adult heartworms. Once mature, heartworms can live for 5 to 7 years in dogs and up to 2 or 3 years in cats. Because of the longevity of these worms, each mosquito season can lead to an increasing number of worms in an infected pet.

EPIDEMIOLOGY

Heartworm infection in dogs has been diagnosed around the globe, including all 50 of the United States. The AHS recommends year-round heartworm prophylaxis for maximal effectiveness. The prescription of heartworm medication requires authorization by a licensed veterinarian having a valid relationship with the client and patient. If records of past treatment and testing do not exist, it is necessary to test the patient before dispensing or prescribing heartworm prevention.

GUIDELINES

Puppies started on a heartworm preventive after 8 weeks of age should be tested 6 months after the initial dose, then annually thereafter.

Before initiating a preventive regime on dogs 7 months of age or older, testing should be performed immediately, then 6 months later, then again in 6 months and annually thereafter. This will avoid delays in detecting subclinical infections and the potential confusion concerning effectiveness of the prevention program if a pre-existing infection becomes evident after beginning preventative.

For dogs *already* on a monthly heartworm preventative, yearly heartworm testing is required because there may be resistant strains of heartworm or doses may not have been given on a strict 30-day basis for the previous year.

If a dog has missed a dose of heartworm preventative or been given a dose late, heartworm testing should be done 6 months after the missed dose.



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