



Healthy Hearts

Basic Heartworm information

How does a dog get heartworms?

- Only by the bite of an infected mosquito. There's no other way dogs get heartworms. And there's no way to tell if a mosquito is infected. That's why prevention is so important.
- It takes about seven months, once a dog is bitten by an infected mosquito, for the larvae to mature into adult heartworms. They then lodge in the heart, lungs, and surrounding blood vessels and begin reproducing.
- Adult worms can grow up to 12 inches in length, can live 5-7 years, and a dog can have as many as 250 worms in its system.
- Because infected mosquitos can come inside, both outdoor and indoor pets are at risk.

What are the signs of heart worms?

- In the early stages, many dogs show few symptoms, but in time signs may include a persistent cough, reluctance to exercise, fatigue, decreased appetite and weight loss. As the disease progresses, pets may develop heart failure and excess fluid in their abdomen and blockages of blood flow to the heart.

What is the treatment?

- The good news is that most infected dogs can be successfully treated. The goal is to first stabilize your dog if he is showing signs of disease, then kill all adult and immature worms while keeping the side effects of treatment to a minimum. The treatment can be expensive and run between \$400-1000.

How do I prevent my pet from getting heart worms?

- The American Heart worm Society recommends that you "think 12:" (1) get your pet tested every 12 months for heartworms and (2) give your pet heartworm preventive 12 months a year.
- There are many products available and the cost is minimal compared to the cost of treating the disease. For less than the cost of going to Starbucks for a weekly coffee, you can prevent heartworm disease in your dog.
- There are monthly pills, monthly topicals that you put on the skin, and there's also a six-month injectable product.
- A year's supply of heartworm preventative will cost about \$35 to \$80, depending on a dog's weight.
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