

SPRING IS HEARTWORM SEASON

Heartworm disease is caused by *Dirofilaria immitis* and is transmitted via a mosquito bite. If an infected mosquito bites your dog and it is not on preventative there is a very good chance he/she will get this disease. It takes approximately 4-6 months before the adult heartworms reach the heart and begin to cause disease. Since most heartworm blood tests detect the adult worms, a dog will not test positive for 4-6 months. The incidence of heartworm disease in both dogs and cats is rising even though there are many good preventative medications available from your veterinarian.

It is important to test your dog, usually in the Spring, for heartworm disease with a blood test that your veterinarian can do in her/his office.

Signs of heartworm disease in dogs include occasional cough, exercise intolerance, cachexia (general ill health and weight loss), syncope (fainting), ascites (abdominal fluid accumulation) and death. Some dogs have no clinical signs at all if caught early.

Signs in cats can include cough, vomiting and sudden death.

Most dogs may be treated by a veterinarian if the disease is detected early with *Immiticide* injections following case work up, exam, blood work and chest x-rays. Usually patients are hospitalized and treatment can be quite expensive especially in large dogs.

There are no good heartworm treatment options for cats and usually they are put on steroids and other medications until the worms die on their own.

There are many heartworm preventative medications available through your veterinarian*. In Michigan, most pets are on preventative May 1st through December 1st. although more and more clients are changing to year-round preventatives for the intestinal parasite control.

Sentinel is a monthly tablet that prevents heartworm disease, de-worms for roundworms, hookworms and whipworms, and sterilizes fleas so as to prevent a flea infestation.

Interceptor does all this except control fleas. *Heartgard* prevents heartworm disease and de-worms for roundworms and hookworms.

Another preventative, *Proheart 6 (now unavailable)*, was a twice a year injection given by a veterinarian, but this was taken off the market due to adverse reactions. I did not like this medication as it did not appear to control or protect against intestinal parasites.

There are also preventatives labeled for cats to prevent heartworm disease and control some intestinal parasites such as *Heartgard* , *Interceptor* and *Revolution* .

I typically recommend Sentinel or Interceptor for dogs and Revolution for cats (this is what I do for my own pets monthly year round).

You should discuss the appropriate medication for your pet with your veterinarian.

*** It is highly recommended that all heartworm medications be purchased from your veterinarian. Not only is it nice to support your veterinarian but most companies do not guarantee their product if not purchased through a veterinarian. There have also been many counterfeit products on the market and internet recently.**

Please note these articles are the opinion of the writer and you should discuss any concerns with your veterinarian.