



Preventing Heartworm Disease

Heartworm is a parasite that is transmitted from one dog to another through the bite of a mosquito. Once a dog has been infected, the worm larvae travel throughout the dog's bloodstream and go through several "molts," eventually winding up as adult heartworms living primarily in the large vessels leading from the heart to the lungs. These worms can be up to 12 inches long. When a dog has adult worms in its heart, it has Heartworm Disease.

Symptoms of heartworm disease

In dogs, signs of heartworm disease may include a mild persistent cough, reluctance to exercise, fatigue after moderate activity, decreased appetite and weight loss. As heartworm disease progresses, pets may develop heart failure. Dogs infected with large numbers of heartworms can develop a sudden blockage of blood flow within the heart leading to a life threatening form of cardiovascular collapse called "caval syndrome."

Treatment of heartworm disease

Heartworm disease can be expensive to treat and can be life threatening. It involves a series of painful injections and several months of oral medication and strict exercise restriction. However, if left untreated it could result in further complications or even death.

Prevention of heartworm disease

There are several products available to prevent heartworm disease. All heartworm preventative medications require a veterinarian's prescription. Your veterinarian may require periodic blood testing to check for Heartworm Disease before prescribing the preventative. These medications work by killing any immature heartworm larvae that your dog may have. In order to be effective, they should be given monthly until after all risk of exposure to mosquitos is passed. Most of these products also treat dogs for intestinal parasites like roundworms, so many people give the medication year-round. If the cost of the medication seems high, ask your veterinarian about generics, and remember that prevention is MUCH cheaper than treating your dog if it does contract the disease.

For more information about signs, treatment, or prevention of heartworm disease, go to www.heartwormsociety.org/pet-owner-resources