

Heartworm Disease

What is heartworm disease?

Heartworm disease is a serious disease caused by infection with a parasitic worm that lives in the heart and adjacent large blood vessels of the lung. A dog can be infected with one to several hundred adult heartworms, which may grow in length of 6-14 inches. Infection has spread rapidly throughout the United States in the past two decades, and heartworm disease is considered to be one of the major canine health problems in our country.

The Mosquito Connection

Heartworms are transmitted from one dog to another by several species of mosquitoes. After a dog is bitten by an infected mosquito, it takes approximately 6 months for the heartworm larvae to reach the arteries of the lung and are then released into the bloodstream. Because the metropolitan DC-VA-MD areas are highly populated with mosquitoes, heartworm disease is a prolific problem in our area.

Adult v. Microfilaria

There are adult heartworms which live primarily in the heart and other organs and microfilaria, which are the young heartworm larvae that travel throughout the bloodstream. Both are dangerous and both cause life-threatening problems in your dog. To see pictures of heartworms, [click here](#) (warning - graphic pictures).

The Damage

Heartworm infection results in extensive damage to the arteries of the lung, heart, liver and kidneys. Much of the damage occurs before there are any outward signs of the disease, and the disease is more difficult to treat by the time the signs are seen. In advanced cases, the prospect of complete recovery is reduced even though treatment may kill all the adult worms. Heartworm treatment is very hard on your dog and many do not live through the treatment.

Testing for Heartworms

Your vet can detect the infection by examining a sample of your dog's blood or an immunologic test for substances. X-rays can also be helpful in recognizing adult heartworms. Your dog should be tested for heartworms as part of their yearly veterinary exam.

Prevention is the Answer

Heartworm disease is completely preventable. As a dog owner, it is your responsibility to prevent this disease. Labs adopted through LRR are required by the Adoption Contract to receive monthly heartworm preventative medicine - we believe that strongly in it. *Preventative medications come in daily and monthly doses and are prescribed by a veterinarian.* One small dosage of this medication on a regular basis can save your dog's life. Get your dog tested for this terrible disease and administer preventative medicine regularly. **Only you can prevent heartworms.**

References

American Heartworm Society, P.O. Box 667, Batavia, IL 60510

American Veterinary Medical Association

Heartworm transmission

Adult heartworms, about six inches long, live in the heart and large blood vessels. These adult male and female worms produce thousands of microscopic baby worms.

Baby heartworms do not grow up in the dog where they were born. If they did, the dog would quickly die and so would the heartworms.

Next, a mosquito comes along and bites the infected dog, sucking up baby heartworms. It probably isn't too good for the mosquito, but this is what the worms have been waiting for. During the next month, inside the mosquito, the heartworm babies grow into heartworm teenagers, a stage partway between baby and adult.

Now, the mosquito bites another dog, infecting it with teenage heartworms, which are now ready to develop into adults. After six or seven more months, the life cycle is complete. The new adult male and female heartworms are busily producing thousands of babies.

Pictures of dogs heart full of heartworms which are carried by mosquitoes.

**PLEASE Treat your dogs.
See your Vet!**

