



Alabama Veterinary Medical Association

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Protecting People, Pets and Livestock - Yesterday, Today and Always.

PRESS RELEASE

April is National Heartworm Awareness Month-It just takes one bite

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONTGOMERY, Ala. - The Alabama Veterinary Medical Association wants to remind pet owners to protect their pets against heartworm disease. Pets are susceptible to heartworms all year round in Alabama. To prevent infection, it is important to continually keep your pet on heartworm preventative medication.

"All pets are at risk for heartworm disease, especially here in Alabama," says ALVMA President John Hammonds, DVM. "Heartworm disease is preventable and treatable if detected early on, but can be fatal if left untreated."

Heartworms are transferred through mosquito bites, they deposit the larvae into the bloodstream of the dog and the worms eventually migrate to the heart and lungs, which usually takes about three months. Depending on the size of the dog, as many as 30 or more heartworms can live in a dog's heart for up to seven years, some reaching a length of a foot long. All it takes is one bite by a mosquito infected with the heartworm larvae for your pet to become infected.

Whether your pets are indoor or outdoor pets, they are at risk. Virtually 100% of dogs exposed to infective larvae become infected. The key to preventing heartworms is to be proactive and administer medication to reduce the chance of your pet developing heartworms. Heartworm preventative is almost 100% effective and also has added benefits as it protects your pets from other parasites like roundworms, whipworms and hookworms. This is important because these parasites can also be harmful to people, especially children. You should never give your pet heartworm medicine until they have been tested. The heartworm test is a simple blood test. There is no effective treatment for heartworm disease in cats, so it is imperative that disease prevention measures be taken for cats.

While there is treatment for heartworm infected dogs, it is expensive and can take several weeks for your pet to recover. Signs of heartworm disease include a persistent cough, reluctance to move or exercise, fatigue after only moderate exercise, reduced appetite and weight loss. It is difficult to see symptoms in recently infected dogs, so a blood test at your veterinarian's office is necessary to determine if your pet is heartworm positive. This blood test should be done annually as part of your healthy pet checkup.

The good news is heartworm prevention is safe, easy and inexpensive. There are a variety of options for preventing heartworm infection in both dogs and cats, including monthly tablets and chewables, monthly topicals and a six-month injectable product (available only for dogs). All of these methods are extremely effective, and when administered properly on a timely schedule, heartworm infection can be completely prevented. These medications interrupt heartworm development before adult worms reach the lungs and heart and cause disease.

Founded in 1907, The Alabama Veterinary Medical Association is comprised of approximately 725 veterinarians from around the state, all committed to protecting People, Pets and Livestock – Yesterday, Today and Always.

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American Heartworm Society