

What is heartworm disease?

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal condition caused by parasitic worms living in the arteries of the lungs and in the right side of the heart of dogs, cats and other species of mammals, including wolves, foxes, ferrets, sea lions and (in rare instances) humans.

Can my dog get heartworm disease?

Yes. Your dog can get heartworm disease, whether he's an "outside" dog or even if he stays inside most of the time. Dogs get heartworm disease from mosquitoes. It is the female mosquito that bites and transmits the infection. Female mosquitoes are very tiny and can easily fit through cracks around windows, doors, or screens. Every dog can be at risk, indoors or out.

Are some dogs more susceptible than other?

Unfortunately no dog or breed of dog is immune to heartworm disease. The mosquito that bites your dog could be carrying this common and deadly parasite. One bite from an infected mosquito is all it takes for your dog to become infected.

How does heartworm disease affect my dog?

Most dogs with heartworm will show no signs of illness for some time. As the disease progresses, dogs experience weight loss, poor hair coats, and tire more easily. Dogs that have a large number of worms living in their hearts will develop signs of heart failure: coughing, difficulty breathing, loss of appetite and possibly fainting.

How can I know for sure if my dog already has heartworm disease?

The only way to know for sure is to have your family veterinarian examine and test your dog. The procedure is quick and easy. But don't delay in calling your veterinarian to arrange for a heartworm test. If your dog gets heartworm disease, treatment can be dangerous for her and expensive for you.

What should I do to prevent my dog from getting heartworm disease?

1. Have your dog checked for heartworm disease annually by your family veterinarian. This is important even if your dog was on preventative medicine from the previous year.
2. Give the preventative medication prescribed by your veterinarian. Medication can be given monthly or once every six months depending on what your veterinarian prescribes.

If my dog gets heartworm disease, can it be treated?

Yes. Most dogs survive with little or no aftereffects if they are treated early. If treatment is delayed, severe heart and lung damage may occur from which the dog may never recover. Prevention is best and much less costly!

Is heartworm medication expensive?

The yearly cost of a test and preventative medication for heartworm infestation is small compared to the cost of treating the disease, especially if there are secondary complications. It is far wiser to administer preventative medication that's as simple as giving one pill every month or having your veterinarian vaccinate your pet twice a year.

Can heartworm disease be transmitted to people?

People are an unnatural host for the heartworm. A few people have been found to have contracted heartworm. Most had only one worm which appeared as a coin lesion on a chest X-ray study. The worm had been walled off by the tissues in the lung, and by the time the diagnosis was made, the worm was dead. Your chances of being struck by lightning are considerably greater; therefore, human heartworm disease does not merit concern.

Keeping your dog's heart healthy.

One major threat to your dog's heart is heart failure. Of the dogs in the United States examined annually by a veterinarian, approximately 3.2 million have some form of acquired heart disease and may be in heart failure.

Heart failure results from the heart's inability to pump blood at a rate required to meet the body's needs. While continuing to work harder to pump blood, the heart damages itself even more.

Although some forms of heart failure in dogs have no visible signs, it can be diagnosed through a clinical evaluation by a veterinarian. Dogs with mild to moderate heart failure typically experience coughing, lethargy and difficulty breathing. Severe heart failure is characterized by difficulty breathing (even at rest), fainting, profound intolerance to exercise, loss of appetite and weight loss.

In addition to safeguarding your dog's heart, there's a lot you can do to keep your dog happy and in top shape. Ensure that your dog gets a moderate amount of exercise on a regular basis and has a balanced diet. An obese dog may have a harder time staying healthy.

By playing it safe and protecting a dog's heart and overall health through proper care and veterinary supervision, pet owners can reap the rewards of love and affection from their dogs for many years to come.

Checklist for vacationing with your dog.

- Before leaving on a long trip, have your dog examined by your veterinarian and given a complete checkup, including a heartworm test.
- If your dog is not accustomed to traveling by car, take it for a few short rides before the trip. Some dogs may require motion sickness medication.
- To help prevent your dog from becoming sick while on an extended trip, withhold food for 12 hours before leaving but do continue to provide drinking water.
- Be sure your dog is always wearing a collar with identification, including rabies and license tags. Keep your pet leashed at all times.
- Don't let your dog ride in the back of a pickup truck or with its head out the window.
- If you must leave your dog in the car, park in the shade and open the windows just enough to let the air inside. In warm, humid weather, dogs should not be left in cars.



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Protect your dog from **HEARTWORM**

Heart Disease
in dogs can be
life threatening

