

HEARTWORM

Heartworm (*Dirofilaria immitis*) is a parasitic worm that affects a variety of different animals including dogs, cats, foxes and 34 other species. It can even infect humans! Heartworm is transmitted by 12 different species of mosquito and contrary to popular belief, they can bite your pet at any time of the day or night and they are living in our area. It takes just one bite for your pet to be infected with heartworm.

Mosquitos pick up the microfilaria (heartworm larvae or babies) from the blood of an infected animal when they bite. The microfilaria live in the mosquito and develop into larvae that are infective. They are then transferred to the next animal when the mosquito gets its next blood meal. The microfilaria migrate through the animals' tissues and into the blood vessels. In the blood vessels they continue to grow. If there are too many microfilaria they can begin to cause clots, especially if they are killed off suddenly such as with some drugs. In the blood vessels the microfilaria continue to grow and travel to the heart and lungs where they mature. Mature heartworm can grow up to 30cm and cause significant clinical problems.

Signs of heartworm disease begin with a cough and/or difficulty breathing due to irritation of the lungs. As the worms grow they cause blockages in the heart and can begin to cause heart disease and later heart failure. Signs often aren't seen until very late in the disease process and treatment is difficult, expensive and often unrewarding.

Luckily we do have preventative products that are available and work very well. A yearly injection of PROHEART can be given by your vet and is available for dogs. It is recommended to start puppies on PROHEART at 12 weeks of age so that they can be protected for their entire life. As the injection is based on weight they do have to come back for a booster at 6 months of age but then they can have one annually with their annual vaccinations. PROHEART can also be started with adult dogs but it is recommended that a blood test for heartworm infection is performed first. PROHEART is safe for breeding dogs both during pregnancy and lactation.

Monthly spot of treatments are also available to prevent heartworm for both dogs and cats and simple to apply but must be done every month without fail. They can be started as early as 9 weeks of age. Whilst the majority of these monthly products are very safe, some of the tablet preventatives can be dangerous if you do not ensure your pet is free of heartworm infection before giving them.

Please call in or phone 53811996 for more information on heartworm preventatives.