

CANINE HEARTWORM DISEASE

What is canine heartworm disease?

Heartworm is a worm-like parasite that lives in the dog's heart and large arteries around the heart. The adult worms produce larvae, called microfilaria, that circulate in the blood stream. When a mosquito bites the dog, it picks up the microfilaria along with the blood. Once inside the mosquito, the microfilaria go through different larval stages, until they mature into infective larvae. The next time the mosquito bites a dog, the infective larvae enter the dog's blood stream, travel to the heart, and mature into adult worms.

What are the signs of heartworm disease?

Dogs with low numbers of worms will often show no outward signs of illness. Dogs with higher numbers of adult worms will have coughing, exercise intolerance, lethargy, and potentially collapse and sudden death.

Do we have to worry about heartworm in the Pacific Northwest?

Heartworm is considered a low risk in the Pacific Northwest because of our relatively cool temperatures year round. However, **there have been reports of heartworm positive dogs with no history of travel outside the Pacific Northwest.** The most recent report was in 2008 of a heartworm positive dog in Cowlitz county that was born and raised in western Washington.

How would I know if my dog became infected with heartworm disease?

We recommend annual heartworm testing for all dogs. Since they can carry the disease without showing clinical signs, the only way we would know if they are infected is to test them. The heartworm test is a simple blood test that we run in the clinic, and is approximately \$37.00.

How can I protect my dog from contracting heartworm disease?

Prevention of canine heartworm disease consists of an oral tablet or chew that is given once monthly, and is very safe. The medication kills the larvae in the blood stream, thereby preventing them from maturing into adult worms. **We recommend monthly prevention for any dog that travels outside of the Pacific Northwest.** At this time, it is not necessary to give prevention for those dogs that do not travel, but as it is a very safe medication, many clients elect to do so. If you are interested in heartworm prevention, please let us know.