

Heartworm Disease

The life cycle of a heartworm...

Heartworms are transmitted from dog to dog by mosquitos. When a mosquito bites a dog it takes a blood meal. If that dog has heartworms, the mosquito can ingest microfilaria (aka baby heartworms) and begin early stages of development. When the same mosquito bites another dog, the microfilaria can be passed along during this blood meal. If a dog is not on heartworm prevention the microfilaria will continue to develop into adult heartworms. Adult heartworms live in the heart and will continue to reproduce if left untreated. The entire cycle from mosquito bite to adult heartworm takes 6 months.

Heartworm prevention...

Prevention against heartworms is available at your licensed Veterinarian. Puppies should be started on preventative by 7-9 weeks of age. Heartworm prevention is given once a month, year-round, for the entire life of the dog. It is recommended that once the puppy reaches 10 months of age it be tested for heartworms. A heartworm test and exam are required once a year to continue to refill the preventative.

Dogs older than 9 months of age will require a heartworm test prior to starting heartworm prevention.

Heartworm treatment...

Dogs that test positive for heartworms must undergo heartworm treatment to kill both the microfilaria and adult worms. If left untreated the adult worms will damage the heart and other organs of the dog.

Heartworm treatment is divided into phases and requires a few months to complete. Each patient will require bloodwork, urinalysis, and chest radiographs to ensure the dog is healthy enough to withstand treatment. During all phases of treatment, the patient will need to have restricted activity while the adult worms are dying and being reabsorbed by the body.

Once treatment is complete the patient will have another heartworm test to ensure treatment success and then continue on a monthly heartworm prevention.