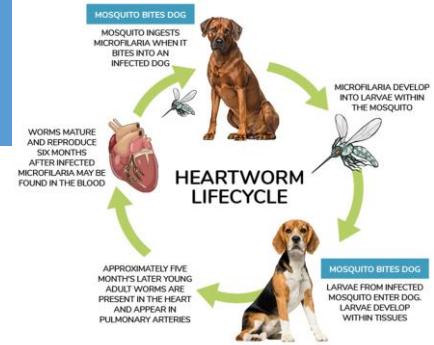


East Suburban Animal Hospital
724-325-3220
Heartworm Disease and Prevention

Heartworms are parasites that live in the heart and large blood vessels of dogs. An infective mosquito must bite the dog in order to infect the dog with heartworms.

KEY POINTS

- We have not seen heartworm infestation in dogs that do not leave the Murrysville area. If you travel outside this area, let us know and we can discuss whether preventative is needed.
- If you see many mosquitos, your dog probably needs heartworm preventative.
- If you travel into a mosquito area, you need to start heartworm preventative within 30 days and continue for at least 3 months after you return.
- If your dog is exposed to areas where other dogs have bowel movements or if it eats raw food or hunts and eats raw flesh, it should be on heartworm preventative medications that also prevent and kill hookworms, roundworms and whipworms.
- The CDC recommends the medication for all dogs year round for public health reasons. Humans can get parasite related diseases from contact with dog/cat feces and contaminated soil around it.
- The American Heartworm Society changes their protocols often. They currently recommend annual testing and 12 months of prevention for all dogs, everywhere. www.heartwormsociety.org



- The mosquito becomes infective by biting a dog with baby heartworms circulating in the blood
- Then the baby heartworms must be present in the mosquito for at least 30 days and the average daily temperature for those 30 days be greater than 57 degrees F. If the average daily temperature is less than 57 degrees, the mosquito usually dies before it becomes infective.
- It takes six months from the time of the mosquito bite until the adult worms get to the heart and begin to reproduce and then spread infection via mosquito bites. The heartworms can obstruct the blood flow and cause damage to the lining of the lungs, heart and large blood vessels. This can cause the infected dog to tire easily and cough or even die.
- The baby heartworms or microfilaria and the adult worms can be detected with a blood test 6 months after the mosquito bite occurs. If heartworms are detected in an early stage, they usually can be successfully treated.

Although the incidence is extremely low, Heartworm disease has been seen in dogs that have not left the Western Pennsylvania area.

All positive heartworm cases we have diagnosed from Western PA were dogs, in an area where the owner knew that there were lots of mosquitoes. All other dogs diagnosed with heartworms came from outside Western Pennsylvania or were strays. In over 40 years, we have never diagnosed a case of heartworms in a dog from Murrysville, Delmont, or Plum that had not traveled outside that area.



Why is Testing Necessary?

Testing before starting the preventative is important because:

- It helps monitor the presence of heartworms and tick borne diseases in the area.
- If heartworm exposure occurred, it helps show compliance, i.e. it got the pills at the right time and did not spit them behind a couch.
- If heartworms develop because of noncompliance or ineffectiveness, they will not be detected and the pet may not be treated until it is too ill to recover.
- Resistance to heartworm preventative has been seen in the south. Studies suggest that continuing the Sentinel for 3 months beyond last exposure overcomes this.
- Heartworm Prevention Manufacturers guarantee their products, but only if your pet has had an annual heartworm test, is on 12 months of prevention, and you buy your medication from a licensed Veterinarian.
- Prevent potential side effects if pet becomes infected.
- For more information: www.heartwormsociety.org

We do over 1,000 heartworm tests a year and usually have 1 or 2 positives. Most were rescues adopted from out of this area or were strays. The test is wrong about one in one thousand times. In an area where mosquitoes are prevalent most of the year, like Georgia, one would expect about 90 % positive tests in untreated dogs.

Like all medications, Heartworm prevention has some potential side effects. This is especially true if pet is already infected with Heartworms, which is why annual testing is required before prescribing the medication. Some herding breeds of dogs can develop ivermectin toxicity, ivermectin is a medication used in some brands of heartworm prevention.

- *If you have Mosquitoes in your area, use Heartworm Prevention*
- *If you travel with your pet, use Heartworm Prevention*
- *If your pet has tested positive for intestinal parasites, use heartworm prevention monthly to deworm and prevent human exposure per CDC*
- *The American Heartworm Society recommends annual Heartworm Testing and 12 month Heartworm Prevention*

Ask one of our Veterinarians for their specific recommendation for your pet and their lifestyle.

In our Hospital we recommend Sentinel.

Sentinel is a monthly pill that prevents heartworms, roundworms, hookworms, whipworms and flea larva growth. We recommend this prevention specifically for its broad spectrum dewormer of both Heartworms and Intestinal Parasites. www.sentinelpet.com

