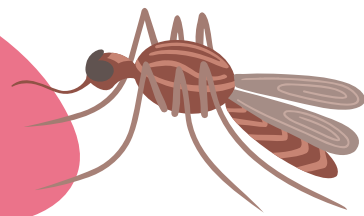


HEARTWORM DISEASE



The American Heartworm Society recommends yearly heartworm tests even if on year round prevention. This is due to some resistance emerging in the southern part of the United States. Yearly testing is good monitoring to ensure this resistance has not moved northward to our region. Heartworms are a very serious condition and can be life threatening if left untreated. **Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes.** Contrary to popular belief, your pet can still get heartworms in the winter time. Mosquitoes are still outside, just in lower numbers and can certainly sneak into our homes as well. The cost for treating heartworms is expensive and the treatment is a painful and long process and there are many side effects and risks that can occur, especially in patients with a high heartworm burden. Here in Southern Indiana we see several cases of heartworms a year.

Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes when they bite your pet. It takes five to six months from the time of infection to result in a positive heartworm test. This is one reason why we recommend yearly heartworm testing. Due to such mild winters mosquitoes are pretty much out year round (just in lower numbers in the winter). Our yearly heartworm tests only require three drops of blood and will screen your dog for heartworms as well as tick borne diseases. You can also check for the presence of microfilaria (baby heartworms) by looking at a blood sample under the microscope.

Cats can get heartworms as well, but cats are unique with their disease. They are often very difficult to diagnose with the normal testing methods we use in dogs due to the way that the heartworm infection manifests in cats.

Clinical signs:

In the early stages of infection there are often no clinical signs which is why it is important to test. As the heartworm infection progresses patients can develop signs such as lethargy, coughing, exercise intolerance, abdominal swelling, possible collapse or even acute respiratory distress. We've even seen patients present with coughing up blood. The earlier the disease is diagnosed the better chance your pet has for a good long term prognosis. Treating a pet that has clinical heart failure or having profound clinical signs due to heartworm disease can be challenging and can result in concerning complications. Cats often will not show many clinical signs and unfortunately will most often present with acute respiratory distress.

Treatment:

The cost for treating a dog for heartworms is equivalent to the cost of purchasing 7-10 years of year round prevention. Treating heartworms is a painful and long process and there are many side effects and risks that can occur, especially in patients with a high heartworm burden. Patients are treated with a combination of antibiotic, steroids and intramuscular injections spanning the course of 3-4 months followed with strict exercise restriction for several more months.

For cats there is no good way to treat the adult heartworms which is why prevention is such an important point for outdoor cats.

Want more information on heartworms? Give us a call or check out the American Heartworm Society website: <https://www.heartwormsociety.org/pet-owner-resources>

