

The Bark & Mew

Information & Updates from Falconbridge Animal Hospital & Village
Veterinary Hospital

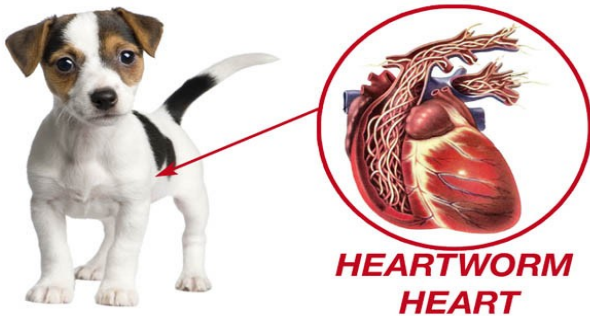
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April is National Heartworm Awareness Month!

Most pet owners know that heartworm medication is the easiest way to prevent heartworm disease; but have you ever wondered how a pet gets heartworms, how your vet knows when heartworms are present, or even what heartworm disease is? Well, Heartworm Awareness Month is here to answer all of your questions and to help protect your pet!



The Facts About Heartworm Disease:

-WHAT it is: heartworm disease is caused by the parasite *Dirofilaria immitis*, a type of roundworm that lives inside the heart and blood vessels of the lungs.

-HOW it occurs: mosquitoes transmit heartworm disease. When a mosquito bites an infected animal and ingests its blood, it carries immature heartworms (called *microfilaria*). These microfilaria mature into larvae inside of the mosquito. Finally, the mosquito bites another animal, leaving the larvae on the skin, where they migrate into the tissue, into the blood vessels and end up in the arteries of the lungs.

-WHEN it occurs: it takes about 6 months for the larvae to grow into mature heartworms and begin multiplying. Mature heartworms can live about 5-7 years inside of a dog and about 2-3 years inside of a cat.

-WHO it affects: heartworms infect over 30 species of animals, but are especially prevalent in domestic dogs and cats.

-WHERE it affects: heartworm disease has been

found in all fifty states, but is mostly found in the southeast United States.

Testing for Heartworm disease:

Most pet owners are aware that their vet checks for heartworms with a simple blood test every year. Veterinarians typically screen with an **antigen test** which detects protein particles that are produced from female heartworms. This test is effective as a screen; however, it can produce false negative results. This can happen if:

- an animal was infected with only male heartworms
- an infected animal has very few heartworms for the protein secreted to be detected
- an animal has been infected less than 6 months prior to testing

If your pet has not been on heartworm prevention or disease is suspected, repeating the antigen test in 6 months can rule out disease. Another test that vets use to detect heartworms is **microfilaria testing**. A veterinarian may use this test if they feel a further test is needed for heartworm detection or for disease confirmation. This test detects the microfilaria, or the immature heartworms. This test could also produce a false negative if:

- an infected animal had very few heartworms
- an infected animal has only male or only female heartworms
- an animal has been infected less than 6 months prior to testing
- heartworm prevention medication has been actively reducing or eliminating the number of microfilaria

Current recommendations from the American Heartworm Society state that a combination test of both antigen and microfilaria testing is the most effective way to screen and confirm heartworm

disease in dogs.

DID YOU KNOW? At Falconbridge Animal Hospital and Village Veterinary Hospital, our heartworm test also tests for three types of **tick-borne diseases** (*Lyme, Ehrlichiosis, and Anaplasmosis*).

Signs and Symptoms:

Early stages of a heartworm infection may not produce any symptoms; however, as the infection progresses signs may include coughing, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, enlargement of the liver, and temporary loss of consciousness.

Symptoms in cats are difficult to diagnose, and in many cases are misdiagnosed for asthma or an allergic reactions. Symptoms could include weight loss, loss of appetite, respiratory distress, coughing, vomiting, and lethargy. Unfortunately, due to a severe allergic reaction to the heartworms, cats can also suffer from sudden death.



Prevention:

The best way to treat heartworm disease is to prevent it from happening to begin with! There are numerous types and brands of heartworm preventions available for both dogs and cats. They should receive year round for the best protection from the disease.

-Dogs: our current recommendation for heartworm prevention in dogs is Iverhart Plus. Iverhart Plus is administered once monthly to prevent and control heartworms, roundworms and hookworms. The active ingredient in this medication is **ivermectin**. If you have questions about this product or heartworm prevention for dogs, please feel free to ask a staff member.

-Cats: our current recommendation for heartworm prevention in cats is Revolution. Revolution is applied once monthly to prevent and control heartworms, fleas, ear mites, hookworms, and roundworms. The active ingredient in this medication is **selamectin**. If you have questions about this product or heartworm prevention for cats, please feel free to ask a staff member.

DID YOU KNOW? Heartworm prevention treats more than just heartworms! It also helps control intestinal parasites, like hookworms and roundworms. Purchase a 6 month supply of Iverheart Plus today and receive a **FREE** fecal test to screen for intestinal parasites!

Treatment:

Treatment of heartworms is difficult. It involves the injection of arsenic-like chemicals, extended activity restriction, antibiotics and heartworm prevention medication. Thanks to heartworm awareness and education, heartworm disease is less common than it was years ago. Heartworm prevention medication and annual heartworm testing are the best defense against the disease!

If you have further questions or concerns about heartworm disease, testing, treatment, or medication, feel free to ask any of our knowledgeable staff members for more information!

DID YOU KNOW? **Lyme** disease is emerging in the Triangle! Ask a staff member for more information about the lyme vaccine and testing!

DON'T FORGET:

Earth Day is April 22nd! Here are some pet friendly ways to go green with you fur-babies:

-R-E-C-Y-C-L-E! Remember to recycle dog/cat food cans. You can also use plastic grocery store bags for poop baggies!

-Use your cloth bags when shopping at pet food stores!

-Buy in bulk, when you can! Go for the big bag of treats; the less you're out buying treats, the less waste you produce!

-Use BPA-free water bottles during walks with your pets instead of plastic bottled water. OR re-use your plastic water bottles by taking off caps and turning them into chew toys for your dogs!

-Scoop your kitty litter instead of dumping. You'll save money and produce less waste!

-SPAY and NEUTER! With about 8 million pets euthanized yearly due to overpopulation alone, spaying/neutering can help reduce our carbon footprint.

