

What happens if my dog tests positive for heartworms?

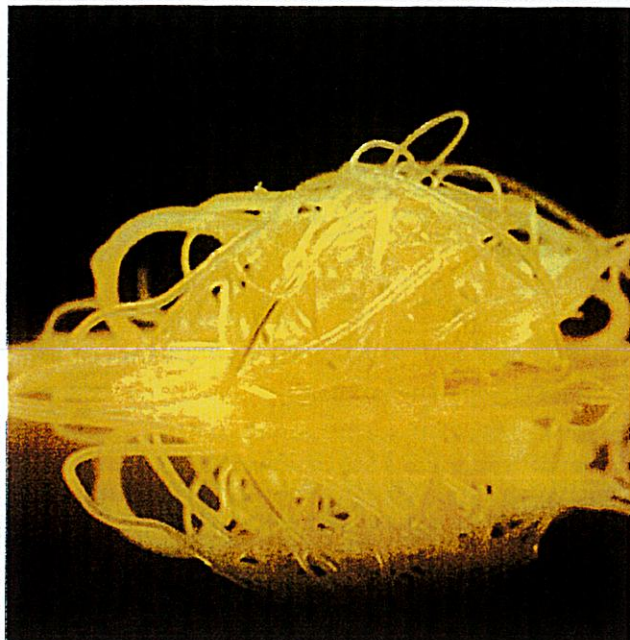


No one wants to hear that their dog has heartworm, but the good news is that most infected dogs can be successfully treated. The goal is to first stabilize your dog if he is showing signs of disease, then kill all adult and immature worms while keeping the side effects of treatment to a minimum.

Here's what you should expect if your dog tests positive:

- **Confirm the diagnosis.** Once a dog tests positive on an antigen test, the diagnosis should be confirmed with an additional test. Because the treatment regimen for heartworm is complex, your veterinarian will want to be absolutely sure that treatment is necessary. **West Memphis Animal Shelter will be responsible for heartworm treatment cost, the shelter veterinarian is Dr. Russell Bell, DVM. Animal Health Center, Marion Arkansas.
- **Restrict exercise.** This requirement might be difficult to adhere to, especially if your dog is accustomed to being active. But your dog's normal physical activities must be restricted as soon as the diagnosis is confirmed, because physical exertion increases the rate at which the heartworms cause damage in the heart and lungs. The more severe the symptoms, the less activity your dog should have.
- **Stabilize your dog's disease.** Before actual heartworm treatment can begin, your dog's condition may need to be stabilized with appropriate therapy. In severe cases of heartworm disease, or when a dog has another serious condition, the process can take several months.
- **Administer treatment.** Once our veterinarian has determined your dog is stable and ready for heartworm treatment, he will recommend a treatment protocol involving several steps. The American Heartworm Society has guidelines for developing this plan of attack. Dogs with no signs or mild signs of heartworm disease, such as cough or exercise intolerance, have a high success rate with treatment. More severe disease can also be successfully treated, but the possibility of complications is greater. The severity of heartworm disease does not always correlate with the severity of symptoms, and dogs with many worms may have few or no symptoms early in the course of the disease.
- **Test (and prevent) for success.** Approximately 6 months after treatment is completed, our veterinarian will perform a heartworm test to confirm that all heartworms have been eliminated. To avoid the possibility of your dog contracting heartworm disease again, you will want to administer heartworm prevention year-round for the rest of his/her life.

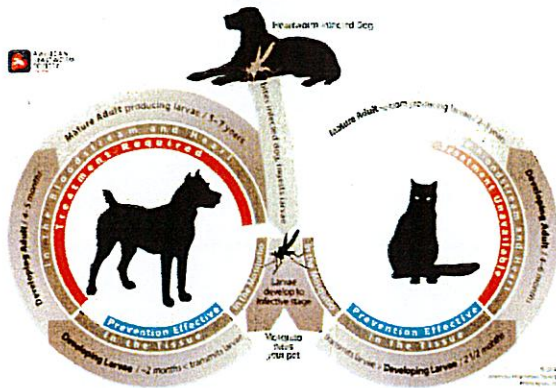
What is heartworm disease?



Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease in pets in the United States and many other parts of the world. It is caused by foot-long worms (heartworms) that live in the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels of affected pets, causing severe lung disease, heart failure and damage to other organs in the body. Heartworm disease affects dogs, cats and ferrets, but heartworms also live in other mammal species, including wolves, coyotes, foxes, sea lions and—in rare instances—humans. Because wild species such as foxes and coyotes live in proximity to many urban areas, they are considered important carriers of the disease.

Dogs. The dog is a natural host for heartworms, which means that heartworms that live inside the dog mature into adults, mate and produce offspring. If untreated, their numbers can increase, and dogs have been known to harbor several hundred worms in their bodies. Heartworm disease causes lasting damage to the heart, lungs and arteries, and can affect the dog's health and quality of life long after the parasites are gone. For this reason, prevention is by far the best option, and treatment—when needed—should be administered as early in the course of the disease as possible.

How is heartworm disease transmitted from one pet to another?



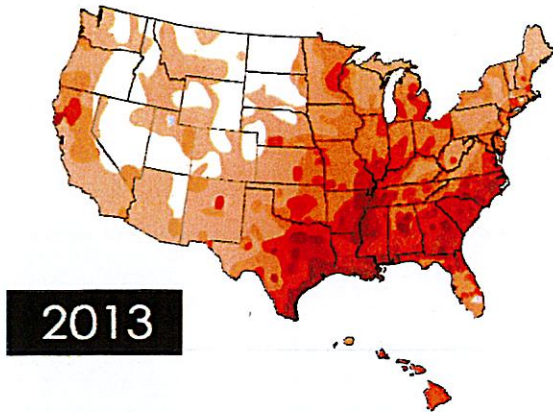
The mosquito plays an essential role in the heartworm life cycle. Adult female heartworms living in an infected dog, fox, coyote, or wolf produce microscopic baby worms called microfilaria that circulate in the bloodstream. When a mosquito bites and takes a blood meal from an infected animal, it picks up these baby worms, which develop and mature into “infective stage” larvae over a period of 10 to 14 days. Then, when the infected mosquito bites another dog, cat, or susceptible wild animal, the infective larvae are deposited onto the surface of the animal's skin and enter the new host through the mosquito's bite wound. Once inside a new host, it takes approximately 6 months for the larvae to mature into adult heartworms. Once mature, heartworms can live for 5 to 7 years in dogs and up to 2 or 3 years in cats. Because of the longevity of these worms, each mosquito season can lead to an increasing number of worms in an infected pet.

What are the signs of heartworm disease in dogs?

In the early stages of the disease, many dogs show few symptoms or no symptoms at all. The longer the infection persists, the more likely symptoms will develop. Active dogs, dogs heavily infected with heartworms, or those with other health problems often show pronounced clinical signs.

Signs of heartworm disease may include a mild persistent cough, reluctance to exercise, fatigue after moderate activity, decreased appetite, and weight loss. As heartworm disease progresses, pets may develop heart failure and the appearance of a swollen belly due to excess fluid in the abdomen. Dogs with large numbers of heartworms can develop a sudden blockages of blood flow within the heart leading to a life-threatening form of cardiovascular collapse. This is called caval syndrome, and is marked by a sudden onset of labored breathing, pale gums, and dark bloody or coffee-colored urine. Without prompt surgical removal of the heartworm blockage, few dogs survive.

How significant is my pet's risk for heartworm infection?



Many factors must be considered, even if heartworms do not seem to be a problem in your local area. Your community may have a greater incidence of heartworm disease than you realize—or you may unknowingly travel with your pet to an area where heartworms are more common. Heartworm disease is also spreading to new regions of the country each year. Stray and neglected dogs and certain wildlife such as coyotes, wolves, and foxes can be carriers of heartworms. Mosquitoes blown great distances by the wind and the relocation of infected pets to previously uninfected areas also contribute to the spread of heartworm disease (this happened following Hurricane Katrina when 250,000 pets, many of them infected with heartworms, were “adopted” and shipped throughout the country).

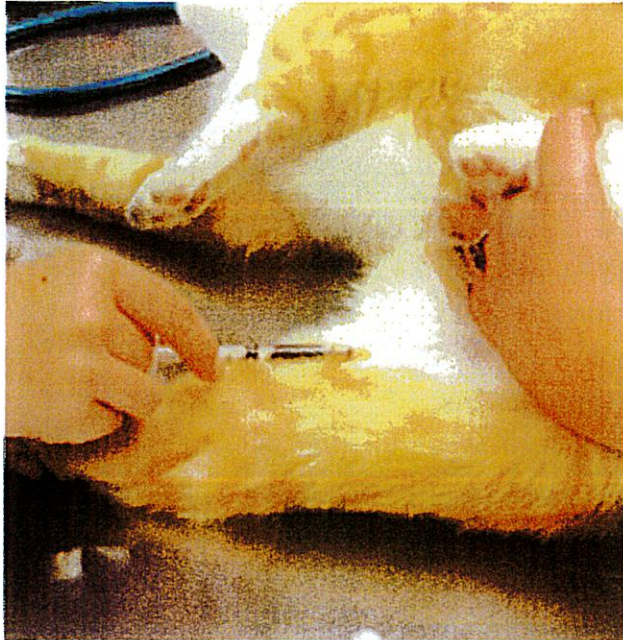
The fact is that heartworm disease has been diagnosed in all 50 states, and risk factors are impossible to predict. Multiple variables, from climate variations to the presence of wildlife carriers, cause rates of infections to vary dramatically from year to year—even within communities. And because infected mosquitoes can come inside, both outdoor and indoor pets are at risk.

For that reason, the American Heartworm Society recommends that you “think 12:” (1) get your pet tested every 12 months for heartworm and (2) give your pet heartworm preventive 12 months a year.

What do I need to know about heartworm testing?

Heartworm disease is a serious, progressive disease. The earlier it is detected, the better the chances the pet will recover. There are few, if any, early signs of disease when a dog or cat is infected with heartworms, so detecting their presence with a heartworm test administered by a veterinarian is important. The test requires just a small blood sample from your pet, and it works by detecting the presence of heartworm proteins. Some veterinarians process heartworm tests right in their hospitals while others send the samples to a diagnostic laboratory. In either case, results are obtained quickly. If your pet tests positive, further tests may be ordered.

When should my dog be tested?



Dogs. All dogs should be tested annually for heartworm infection, and this can usually be done during a routine visit for preventive care. Following are guidelines on testing and timing:

- Puppies under 7 months of age can be started on heartworm prevention without a heartworm test (it takes at least 6 months for a dog to test positive after it has been infected), but should be tested 6 months after your initial visit, tested again 6 months later and yearly after that to ensure they are heartworm-free.
- Adult dogs over 7 months of age and previously not on a preventive need to be tested prior to starting heartworm prevention. They, too, need to be tested 6 months and 12 months later and annually after that.
- If there has been a lapse in prevention (one or more late or missed doses), dogs should be tested immediately, then tested again six months later and annually after that.

Annual testing is necessary, even when dogs are on heartworm prevention year-round, to ensure that the prevention program is working. Heartworm medications are highly effective, but dogs can still become infected. If you miss just one dose of a monthly medication—or give it late—it can leave your dog unprotected. Even if you give the medication as recommended, your dog may spit out or vomit a heartworm pill—or rub off a topical medication. Heartworm preventives are highly effective, but not 100 percent effective. If you don't get your dog test, you won't know your dog needs treatment.

Heartworm Treatment is a procedure consisting of three (3) injections.

1st injection will begin after the 30 days of Doxycycline have been completed. Day procedure with strict observation by vet staff.

2nd & 3rd injections will begin 30 days after the 1st injection but will be performed in two consecutive days requiring an overnight stay.

Morning of Heartworm Treatment

1. Remember to take your health record for your pet given to you by the animal shelter.
2. Arrive at the Animal Health Center, the address is 2418 AR-77, Marion, AR 72364.
3. The drop-off time is between 7:30-9:00 am.
4. Dr. Bell or Dr. Gross will be the attending veterinarians.
5. The staff will advise you as to what time to pick up for 1st injection. Injection 2 will require an overnight stay so ask what time to pick up after Injection 3.
6. Your pet will be listed under the name given by the Animal Shelter.
7. If you need to reach the vet office, their number is 870-739-3382, please contact them if you will be late for any scheduled appointments/treatments.

Regimen for Heartworms Prior to Treatment

You will be provided with 30 days' worth of antibiotic, Doxycycline. The American Heartworm Society currently recommends a 30-day course of doxycycline BID, for the treatment of canine heartworm disease.

Doxy is necessary for the reduction of the bacterium Wolbachia, found in all heartworm life-stages. Treatment with doxy reduces Wolbachia numbers in all stages of heartworms and improves outcomes and decreased microfilaremia in dogs treated for heartworm disease.

Don't Panic but on occasion, dogs taking doxy will start to cough. If the dog begins vomiting, coughing or has any blood in their sputum, while on the Doxycycline, please stop the medication immediately and notify the director, Kerry Facello by TEXT to 901-337-3652. Keep your dog as calm and relaxed as possible, as you want to prevent him/her from overexerting themselves.

One week prior to completing the doxy, please call the shelter at 870-732-7599 to schedule the treatment with the veterinarian's office.

There is only one drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration to kill adult heartworms in dog, an organic arsenical compound that is injected into the dog's lumbar, or back muscles.

On the days the injections are given, your dog must stay in the hospital for observation to make sure he/she does not have any serious reactions to the treatment. The vet may also prescribe a tapering dose of steroids for a period of time following the injections.

*****IMPORTANT; COMMON REACTIONS FOLLOWING HEARTWORM TREATMENT*****

Clinical Observation for Adverse Reactions	Average onset time in days (when you should expect symptoms to be present)	Average duration in days (how long this condition may last)
Injection Site: Swelling Pain/discomfort Inflammation/heat	6 1 3	18 3 9
Persistent: (lumps, knots, nodules, masses)	22	47
Abscess: (sterile or septic)	24	21
Coughing/Gagging:	10	13
Depression/Lethargy:	5	6
Anorexia/Inappetence:	5	5

But wait, there's more! Your dog should be retested 6 months after treatment and again at one year. Sometimes it may take up to a year for your dog to test negative. Also, during the whole procedure, it is best to keep your dog on monthly prevention, Advantage Multi is a good topical ointment that treats them for heartworm prevention, flea control and monthly internal parasites.

