

POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES

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Heartworm Prevention For Dogs & Cats

Heartworm is a potentially lethal parasite that's transmitted by mosquitoes to thousands of unprotected dogs and cats each year. Heartworm disease has been recorded in all 50 states, so Indiana pets are at risk. The good news is that heartworm is virtually 100% preventable when you administer heartworm medication to your dog or cat properly. Yet, an estimated 27 million U.S. dogs – and an untold number of cats – are currently not on a heartworm preventative. Indiana-PAW hopes to increase the number of Hoosier pets who are protected from this potentially deadly disease.

What is Heartworm Disease?

Heartworm Can Be Lethal To Your Dog Or Cat



- Heartworm is a parasite that develops and lives in the large blood vessels around the heart and lungs of infected dogs and cats.
- Heartworm is transmitted to dogs and cats through the bite of a mosquito carrying the microscopic heartworm larvae.
- Mosquitoes become heartworm carriers by biting an already infected animal and then biting other healthy animals, depositing the larvae in the skin. The heartworm larvae migrate through the tissue and into the bloodstream. Typically, within six months, the larvae have developed into adult heartworms and are present in the dog or cat's pulmonary arteries.
- When left untreated, heartworms can cause serious damage to your dog or cat's tissues, leading to heart failure, lung disease, and ultimately, death. In dogs, heartworms can also obstruct other large blood vessels, resulting in kidney and liver failure.
- Heartworm disease can be fatal to both dogs and cats. It's more commonly found in dogs and highly dangerous to them. But it's actually even more deadly in cats, because of the way their bodies react to the worms.
- Dogs and cats of any age and breed are susceptible to heartworm disease.

Signs & Symptoms

Dogs

- Deep chest cough
- Fatigue & lethargy
- Labored breathing
- Weight loss
- Abdominal distention or bloating

Cats

- Coughing/gagging
- Fatigue & lethargy
- Labored breathing
- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Sudden death

- In some cases, an infected dog or cat may not show any signs or symptoms. This is why periodic testing is so important. Many cats seem to be in good health, but then die suddenly from heartworm disease.

How To Detect & Prevent Heartworm?

Test Your Dog Or Cat

- Your veterinarian can run a simple blood test to determine whether or not your dog or cat has been exposed to heartworm infection.
- If the test is positive, x-rays and ultrasounds may be needed to determine the extent of the infection.
- There are safe, effective medications available to treat dogs infected with heartworm.
- There is, however, currently no drug available to treat cats infected with heartworm. This is why it's so important to have your cats on preventative medication (see below).

Start Your Pet On Preventative Medication

- Your veterinarian can provide you with a number of options for protecting your dog or cat against heartworm disease. Your vet will help match you with a preventative that matches your pet's needs and your preferences.
- Preventative options run the gamut from monthly oral tabs, to topical drugs, to a twice-yearly injectable medication.
- Many heartworm preventatives also help protect your pets against other parasites, such as roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, and in some instances, even help with flea control.
- Most veterinarians will recommend your pet stay on heartworm preventative medication year-round.
- Remember, **prevention is the key** to keeping your pet safe and healthy from heartworm disease! Keep in mind that:
 - A bite from just one mosquito is enough to infect your dog or cat and put their life at risk.
 - Mosquitoes can survive the winter by living in basements, garages or sheds. They then become active once temperatures regularly rise above freezing.
- Indiana-PAW encourages you to talk to your veterinarian today – heartworm is easy to prevent, and your pets are depending on you!

Suggested Reading

- Drs. Foster & Smith, "Heartworm Disease: What You Need to Know," <http://www.drsfostersmith.com/pic/article.cfm?aid=579>
- American Heartworm Society, "Quick Review of Heartworm Disease," <http://www.heartwormsociety.org/QuickReview.htm>

Important Note: Indiana-PAW's POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES is intended to provide quick tips to help citizens address common pet health and behavior questions. It is not intended to replace consultation with one's veterinarian and/or a trained behavior specialist.