



“...a 10-fold increase in the number of ‘seen and treated’ cases of heartworm disease...” OVMA Press Release, November 3, 2009.

Heartworm is found in the heart of infected animals. It is spread by mosquitoes; when the mosquito bites an infected animal it can then pass on the infection to healthy, unprotected ones. If allowed to mature in the dog the heartworm will continue to multiply in the heart until it causes heart failure. This may take many years before your pet shows signs. There is treatment for the worms but this is expensive and there is a risk of potential fatal complications after treatment. Then there is also the damage to the heart that the pet must now live with, potentially shortening their lives. Therefore the best defense against this disease is prevention.

This parasite has significant potential to be transmitted to people and other animals. The domestic and feral (stray) cat, wild dogs and ferrets have been found to be infected with heartworm. With humans the parasites usually migrate to the eye or lungs, but it can also affect the skin or other body parts. As with the recommendations for cold and flu season the most susceptible are infants, young children, the elderly, women who are pregnant, diabetics and those whose immune system is compromised.

It is safer for your pet to prevent heartworm rather than treating your pet once the infection has occurred. Treatment is costly and can be very dangerous for your pet as this requires killing all of the adult worms present and the immature ones at the same time. Your pet must be hospitalized during the treatment.

Prevention is more effective and safer for your pet. It is far less expensive than treating for heartworm.

Don't forget about yourself; the best defense against becoming infected yourself is to discourage infected mosquitoes from biting you. Remember to use insect repellants, wear long sleeve shirts and ankle-length pants when outside in areas with mosquitoes. Try to avoid being outside during peak mosquito times.

Heartworm is detected through a blood test, not from a physical exam or through a fecal test.

For further information on this potentially fatal disease go to:

www.heartgard.ca

www.animalhealth.bayer.ca