

HEARTWORM DISEASE

What is heartworm disease?

Heartworms are parasites of the dog's heart and lungs. These parasites are spread by mosquitoes from infected dogs to uninfected dogs. The adult worms produce microfilaria (baby worms) that circulates in the blood stream. When a mosquito takes a blood meal it absorbs the microfilaria along with the blood from the infected dog. The microfilaria become larvae within the mosquito and migrates to the mosquito's mouth parts. The mosquito then takes a blood meal from an uninfected dog and deposits the larvae into that dog's blood stream. The larvae then develop into adult worms that live within the heart and lungs where they can cause severe damage.

How is heartworm disease diagnosed?

Heartworm disease is diagnosed by a blood test. This test is run in our hospital and takes only a few minutes to complete.

What symptoms do I look for?

Symptoms include coughing, listlessness, weight loss, decreased endurance and difficulty breathing. Some dogs show no symptoms so blood testing is very important to detect the disease.

How can I protect my dog from heartworm disease?

We recommend placing all dogs by six months of age on a preventative medication called Interceptor (milbemycin). This is a chewable tablet you give your dog by mouth, monthly, for the rest of the dog's life. The medicine kills any larvae that may have been deposited into the dog's blood stream by mosquitoes over the previous month.

If your dog is over six months of age, the heartworm blood test must be run prior to starting the Interceptor. If we start the Interceptor without testing, and your dog has heartworm, the Interceptor could cause an adverse reaction.

Is my dog at risk in the north Glendale and Peoria area?

Yes, the man made ponds, flood irrigation and golf courses have created a source of standing water, which is an excellent breeding ground for mosquitoes. The combination of our mild climate, mosquito breeding grounds and an influx of dogs from endemic areas (Illinois, California, East Coast) have created a dramatic increase in the number of cases of heartworm disease in northern Glendale and Peoria.