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What is Heartworm Disease?

Heartworm is spread through mosquitoes. Heartworms are long slender spaghetti-type worms. They can grow up to 15-30 cm. As adults they live in the right side of the dog's heart. Heartworm affects dogs of all ages, from puppies to seniors.

Mosquitoes will bite an infected dog or coyote sucking up the small baby worms (microfilaria) from the blood. The carrier mosquito will then bite another dog injecting the microfilaria into that dog's tissue. The microfilarias migrate to the heart where they feed and grow into adults. The microfilaria can live up to 2 years within the host dog in whom they were born.

The adult worms will then produce new larva that circulate through the dog's blood waiting to be picked up by the next biting mosquito, and thus the cycle continues.

In the early stages of infection heartworm infected dogs show little or no symptoms. Heartworm disease is usually detected after the disease has progressed and damage has been done to the dog's heart and lungs.

Prevention is key

Heartworm testing should be done on every dog that was exposed to mosquitoes over the previous heartworm season before starting a preventative program.

Testing for heartworm should be done in the spring (late April - May) before the hot weather and mosquito season arrives. Testing involves taking a small blood sample to check for the presence of heartworm disease. Once the result has come back negative for the disease, then a heartworm prevention schedule recommended by our doctors can be started.

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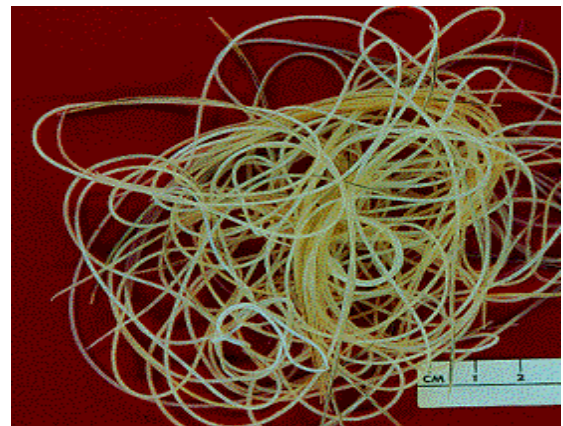
What is heartworm?

How do I know if my dog has heartworm?

Prevention

Symptoms of Heartworm Disease

- Chronic cough
- Exercise intolerance
- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Rapid or labored breathing



Heartworms removed from a dog on autopsy

Treatments are once monthly usually started on June 1st and continued throughout the summer until November. It is mandatory to give your dog the required medication each month. Missing a month of medication can leave your dog susceptible to becoming infected by the disease.

Yearly testing each spring is recommended to ensure the safety of your dog.

Remember it only takes one mosquito bite to infect a dog with heartworm!