

# Protecting Your Dog From Heartworm Disease

Heartworms cause a serious disease that can rob a dog of its health and even its life. It is so important to understand that preventing heartworm disease is easier, safer, and more economical than treating adult heartworms. Treating a heartworm infection typically requires hospitalization of the dog and weeks of inactivity at home.

In order to prevent heartworm disease, it is important that dogs on a monthly preventative receive their dose every 30 days year-round. Gaps in protection allow larval stages of heartworms to continue their development, resulting in heartworm disease with adult worms in the heart and lungs. These gaps could result in the dog requiring a long and expensive treatment for heartworms. Below are five ways you can work with your veterinarian to achieve heartworm protection for your pet.

## **1. Start puppies on a heartworm preventative on their first visit to the clinic, usually about 6-8 weeks of age.**

Mosquitoes can bite a dog at any age, so puppies are at risk for heartworm disease from the moment they are born. The American Heartworm Society recommends that puppies be started on a heartworm preventative as soon as possible, but no later than 8 weeks of age. Heartworm larvae that have been picked up in the previous 30 days are killed following administration of monthly heartworm preventatives. Starting puppies on a preventative at their first visit will help keep them protected.

## **2. Avoid lapses in prevention.**

Dogs that miss one or more doses of their monthly heartworm preventative are at increased risk to develop heartworm disease. Gaps in prevention are the most common reason why dogs receiving prevention end up becoming heartworm positive. Forgetting to re-purchase heartworm preventatives on time is easy to do, but it's also simple to avoid. Our staff at Clarke Animal Hospital understands how important year-round heartworm prevention is. It is because of this we have instilled a reminder system through emails or mail to help you remember when you will need to pick up prevention for your pet. Additionally, in effort to make the prevention more affordable, we offer discounts and rebates on heartworm preventions- many of which are competitive with online pharmacies!

Lastly it is important to know that all of our prevention is backed up by the manufacturer guarantee ONLY if the pet has been on the prevention year round. This means if your pet tests positive following a year of taking the prevention, the manufacturer will pay for the entire heartworm treatment.

## **3. Make sure you have separate heartworm preventatives for each of your pets.**

Multiple dog households are prime candidates for missed prevention and heartworm positive dogs, because owners often share heartworm preventatives between dogs. This can result in missed doses or a dog not receiving proper product for its weight. Additionally, guarantees by a prevention manufacturer are void if a pet has not been given the prevention year round.

## **4. Give special attention to any dog previously treated for heartworm disease.**

If your dog has been previously treated for heartworm disease, keeping him on year round prevention is imperative! Even though a dog might have tested heartworm negative during or after treatment, any missed doses around the time of treatment could result in another heartworm infection that would not be detectable for several months.

## **5. Test your dog annually.**

Dogs must be tested each year for heartworm disease. Puppies will need their first test at 7 months of age. It is important to realize that a negative test does not guarantee that an infection is not present. Since the test only detects the presence of adult heartworms, only infections 6 months or older will test positive. The dog which tests negative may be truly negative or could have developing larval stages, immature adult worms, or even a small number of mature worms.

