

# Heartworm Prevention

**ALL dogs and cats are at risk for getting heartworm disease. Pets need prevention. Some last longer than others.**

## Canine Heartworm Disease

### **What are heartworms?**

Heartworms (*D. Immitis*) are exactly what they sound like, worms that live in the heart. Males grow 4-6” in length and female heartworms grow 10-12” in length. Adult worms live and reproduce in the dog’s heart circulating baby heartworms (microfilaria) through the bloodstream. Those baby heartworms take up to a year to mature into an adult, and at that time, start to reproduce more babies (microfilaria). A dog can have up to 250 worms living in their heart. Heartworms survive and reproduce for 5-7 years.

### **How do dogs get heartworms in the first place?**

Mosquitoes. Mosquitoes land on a heartworm positive dog, take a blood meal, and fly over to your dog and deposit larval stages of heartworms. These microscopic pre-microfilaria heartworms migrate to the blood stream and continue their life cycle. Because mosquitoes are attracted to carbon dioxide, dogs are a natural target for mosquitoes. Virtually all dogs are at risk whether indoors or out and heartworm disease has been diagnosed in all 50 states. That’s right, even the cold states!

### **Why is this bad for my dog?**

Blood circulates through the bloodstream in our bodies which is powered by the heart pumping it through. When 250 worms between 4-12 inches in length are obstructing the flow, the heart has to work harder and eventually, it will no longer be able to keep up, almost always resulting in sudden death.

### **Why do I need to test for heartworms, won’t I see signs?**

During early to mid-stages of heartworm disease, your dog may not show any signs that he or she has been infected. It’s not until very advanced stages of heartworm disease that you will

start to notice symptoms like coughing, lethargy, weakness, exercise intolerance, distended abdomen, etc. At this point, it may be too late to treat your dog for heartworms.

### **Can't I just treat my dog for heartworms if he gets it?**

If heartworm disease is caught early enough, treatment with an adulticide can be done. However, treating dogs for heartworm disease can be very expensive. Usually it will cost anywhere from \$500-\$2,000 depending on the weight of the dog and diagnostic tests performed. Along with high cost, it also comes with high risk. The treatment breaks up the worms into very small pieces so the dog must be kept calm, quiet, and confined for 6-8 weeks afterwards. Sometimes mild sedation is necessary for the entire 6-8 week window if a dog is very active. After treatment is complete, your dog can still get heartworms again. All it takes is another bite from an infected mosquito.

### **How can I prevent this from happening to my dog?**

Easy! Heartworm prevention needs to be given every 30 days or once a month. Prevention is relatively inexpensive costing anywhere from \$5.00 a month to about \$20 with other preventatives like flea control built in to the product.