



This Month: Heartworms

With the mosquito season already upon us, heartworm prevention is a must this May.

What is a Heartworm?

A heartworm is a roundworm-like parasite that lives and grows in the bloodstream and heart of dogs, cats, and about 30 other animal species, including wolves, ferrets, and sea lions. The species of heartworm that affects dogs and cats is *Dirofilaria immitis*. There is no cure for heartworm in cats, and if untreated it is deadly in dogs. That is why it is so important to keep both dogs and cats on a heartworm preventative year round.

The heartworm is transmitted through mosquito bites from a currently infected animal. When an adult heartworm living within an infected animal has matured (usually 6-7 months after the original infection date) it will release microfilariae, which are the first stage of heartworm larvae, into the bloodstream. When a mosquito bites your pet and sucks the blood, these undeveloped larvae will be transferred into the feeding mosquito. After a 10-14 day required incubation period within the mosquito the larvae will mature to their next stage and be able to infect a dog or cat during the mosquito's next meal. Traveling through the bite wound, the infective larvae get into the animal's blood stream and spend the next 2-3 months maturing. The mature worms settle in the right side of the heart and arteries of the lungs, restricting blood flow to the lungs and other important organs.

Dogs and Heartworms:

Signs of heartworm disease in dogs include lethargy and listlessness, tiring easily after exercise, weight loss and poor appetite, anemia, and an occasional or persistent cough.

Once diagnosed, dogs can undergo a treatment of injections and confinement lasting six weeks that can kill the adult heartworms and expel them from the system.

Cats and Heartworms:

Signs of heartworm disease in cats are unpredictable at best and may appear to be the symptoms of other illnesses. Many cats appear to be perfectly fine until their sudden death, when a necropsy will show heartworms.

If diagnosed, there is no cure for heartworms in cats. Some cats may be resistant and kill the worms on their own; others can be treated for symptoms with fluids, confinement, oxygen therapy, anti-inflammatory drugs, and other measures.

Other Heartworm Facts:

- Heartworms were first discovered in 1847, and have been found in the liver, trachea, esophagus, stomach, feces, eyes, brain, spinal cord, and vomit of dogs as well as in the more common heart and lungs.
- The longest heartworm ever found was 14 inches in length, and one dog found had a total of 70ft of heartworms in his heart and blood vessels!
- Puppies and kittens should be started on heartworm prevention by 8 weeks of age – even young pets can contract heartworms.
- In any area that dogs get heartworms, cats can get them as well, and the rate of diagnosis is usually 5-20% that of dogs.
- Heartworms have been diagnosed in all 50 states, including Alaska!
- Lastly, it is estimated that 200 million people have been infected with heartworms, but luckily for us it does not affect humans in the same way as dogs and cats!

Heartworm Prevention:

Much like the vaccines your pet gets every year, heartworm prevention is an important part of pet ownership. A monthly flavored “treat” of Heartgard, Tri-heart, or another heartworm preventative will provide enough medicine in the pet’s system for a full month of worry-free heartworm prevention.

Heartworm preventatives, once ingested or applied topically (depending on the product) will spread throughout the system, killing the worms in their larval stage. Unfortunately, no heartworm preventatives are able to kill adult heartworms, so if your pet hasn’t been on any heartworm preventative in at least six months a heartworm test would be done first to make sure your pet isn’t already infected with adult heartworms.

Why is prevention so important? Dogs and cats on heartworm prevention live longer, healthier lives. For anywhere between \$6-\$10 a month you can prevent a costly recovery or untimely death. It only takes **one** mosquito to infect a dog or cat, and only **one** heartworm to kill your feline friend.

What if you forget a month? While it is important to keep your pet on heartworm protection year round (especially in the hot humid climate of the southeast where mosquitoes are a threat throughout the winter), if you forget to give heartworm medication over one month don’t panic. Some heartworm prevention products can actually kill heartworm larvae that are already in the system if they are given within a certain timeframe. Repeated errors in prevention administration, however, will increase the probability that your pet could contract this common parasite. Talk to your vet to make sure it will be safe to put your pet back on heartworm prevention.

For more information on heartworms in dogs and cats, visit the American Heartworm Society’s webpage at <http://www.heartwormsociety.org/GeneralInfo.htm>

Success Story: Topsy!

Topsy was a ten week old Pit-bull mix who presented to the FRAH for bloody diarrhea. She had never been vaccinated and tested positive for parvovirus, a deadly virus that usually affects puppies under six months of age. Despite the expense of the procedure and poor prognosis, the owner decided to go ahead with the intensive treatment. For one week, Topsy was hospitalized at the FRAH for fluid treatment with antibiotics and vitamins. By day five, Topsy was eating and drinking on her own, and after a weekend of continual improvement, she was allowed to go home.

For the past six weeks, Topsy has only been improving, and once completely better she was given her first booster shot of DHLPPC (known as 'Distemper' in the vet world) which includes the Parvovirus vaccine.

Dates, Upcoming News, Specials:

May 1st – 5th is National Pet Week and Be Kind to Animals Week. May 15th -19th is National Dog Bite Prevention week.

May 13th is Animal Disaster Preparedness Day.

May 23rd is World Turtle Day.

Two of our staff are getting married in May! Be sure to give Amanda and Rebecca a hearty "good luck" the next time you stop in ;)

Buy six doses of Revolution or Frontline Plus and get a seventh dose free! Both products will protect your animal from fleas for a full month, and both are waterproof, so Fido can still go swimming at the beach!

With the warmer weather the FRAH is getting busy again! Be sure to schedule your appointments well in advance to insure you get the best time possible.

Enter to win free annual exams for your pet's life! Stop by the FRAH for details on how to enter this "National Pet Wellness Month" sweepstakes

Cat for Adoption!

The FRAH currently has a cat for adoption! Susie was left behind when one of our kennel staff's neighbors moved. She is an adult calico, about 2 years old, spayed and has all her vaccines. She is very good with other dogs, cats, and people! If you are interested, call the FRAH or stop in a see her!