



## Heartworms: Prevention is Key

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal condition caused by parasitic worms living in the arteries of the lungs and occasionally in the right side of the heart of dogs, cats and other species of mammals. Dogs and cats of any age or breed are susceptible to infection. Adult heartworms can reach lengths of 6-12 inches! Treatment of heartworm disease varies and largely depends on the severity of the disease. Treatment can be time consuming and costly for an owner. The best way to avoid heartworm disease altogether is to provide consistent heartworm prevention medication to your pets.

### Life Cycle

Dogs become infected with heartworms by being bitten by a mosquito. Even if your dog has a thick fluffy coat he/she can still be bit by a mosquito. The life cycle of a heartworm is as follows:

1. A mosquito bites an infected dog picking up microfilaria (baby heartworms).
2. The babies incubate inside the mosquito for 2-3 weeks turning into larvae (teenager heartworms).
3. The mosquito bites another dog depositing the larvae.
4. The larvae migrate to the subcutaneous tissue, muscle, and fat for 2-3 months.
5. Larvae migrate to the heart where they reach full reproductive adulthood in 2-3 months.
6. These adults produce babies and the cycle continues...

### Symptoms of Infection

Symptoms of heartworms include; a deep cough, weight loss, weakness, listlessness, and poor body condition. Unfortunately, by the time these symptoms appear the worms have usually done some damage.

### Prevention

It is very important to keep your pet on a preventative **year round** and have them tested at least once every 2 years. We strongly recommend that you come by and discuss your prevention options. Your pets will love you for it!

Go to [www.heartwormsociety.org](http://www.heartwormsociety.org) for further info.