

# FELINE HEARTWORM DISEASE

Did you know one mosquito bite can infect your cat with heartworm, a potentially deadly disease? All cats should be on once a month preventative medication during the mosquito season. Though effective preventative medications have been available for dogs for years, more than 1/3 of dogs in our area are not being protected. Many of them are harboring the heartworm parasite. Mosquitoes then carry the disease from infected dogs to other pets, and occasionally to people as well.

Less than 5% of U.S. households with cats regularly administer heartworm preventatives to their feline friends. In contrast, 59% of dog owners regularly use a heartworm prevention product on their dogs. In both cats and dogs this is a very preventable disease. When used properly, Ivermectin, selamectin and milbemycin, the three available heartworm preventative medications, are all almost 100%

*continued next page...*

## SIGNS ASSOCIATED WITH HEARTWORM ASSOCIATED RESPIRATORY DISEASE:

**ACUTE:** Collapse, labored or rapid breathing, seizures, vomiting/diarrhea, blindness, high heart rate, fainting and sudden death

**CHRONIC:** Coughing, vomiting, labored breathing, lethargy, poor appetite, weight loss, fluid accumulation in the chest cavity

When an infected mosquito bites the cat, heartworm larvae are deposited in the skin. They penetrate into the veins and are then swept up by the bloodstream and travel through the heart to the pulmonary (lung) arteries. These arteries almost immediately become enlarged and inflamed. After three to four months the immature worms, which are now over two inches long, usually die, causing a severe inflammatory response, which leads to significant damage to the lungs. (In dogs, the worms eventually make it to the heart and grow to an adult size of 8-10 inches long within the heart, but in cats, most larvae die before reaching this stage.)



Caring People Helping Pets:

**BEST FRIENDS**  
VETERINARY CENTER



effective in preventing the disease. In addition, these medications help to prevent intestinal parasites.

Feline heartworm is expanding across the United States. The rate of heartworm infection is much higher than that of Feline Leukemia or Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, two other common, infectious and fatal cat diseases.

With dogs, heartworm typically isn't a problem until the worms reach the adult stage in the pulmonary arteries and heart. With cats, however, the presence of heartworm larvae causes lesions in the lung tissue. The term Heartworm Associated Respiratory Disease (HARD) has been coined to describe the lung lesions and other respiratory problems associated with heartworms in cats.

Heartworms can be fatal if the worms reach the adult stage, which occurs about 10% of the time. Even in the late stages, afflicted animals often exhibit no symptoms until they die suddenly.

**Because there is no effective way to treat the disease in cats once infection occurs, prevention is the only viable way to fight feline heartworms.**

*If you don't yet have your cat on a heartworm preventative now is the time to come and pick some up. We'll even mail it to you if you like! Give us a call.*

## HEARTWORM MYTHS

### #1 It's a dog disease

Heartworm disease affects cats differently than dogs, but the disease is equally serious in cats and dogs

### #2 It's a disease of outdoor cats

It only takes one mosquito to infect a cat with heartworms. Because mosquitoes commonly get indoors, both indoor and outdoor cats are at risk. In fact, 1/4-1/3 of affected cats (depending on the study) never go outdoors.

### #3 It's a heart disease

In cats, heartworms mainly affect the lungs, not the heart. Signs are often mistaken for asthma, allergic bronchitis or other respiratory diseases. Coughing/ wheezing, vomiting and sudden death are the most common symptoms.

### #4 The cat must have one or more adult heartworms in the heart to become ill

Heartworm larvae are actually the main cause of problems as they migrate through the lungs. 50% of cats infected with heartworm larvae have damage to the small arteries that supply blood to the lungs.

### #5 Diagnosis is difficult

Although falsely negative test results are common in cats, a positive test result is usually accurate. Your cat should be tested if any of the common heartworm disease symptoms are present.

Caring People Helping Pets



2082 Cheyenne Court, Grafton, WI 53024 • phone: 262-375-0130 • fax: 262-375-4196 • [www.bestfriendsvet.com](http://www.bestfriendsvet.com)

