

# Heartworm Disease-What you should know!

## What is heartworm disease?

Heartworm ( *Dipylaria Immitis*) is a parasite (worm) that is transmitted from infected dogs by over 60 of mosquitoes to other dogs, cats and ferrets. The baby worms (larvae) must be transmitted by the mosquitoes to the infective. It takes about six months from the time that the larvae is introduced into the pet, migrates through the body to the heart and vessels going to the lungs where it matures into an adult.

## How prevalent is heartworm disease in our area?

The Evansville area has historically been grouped in the second highest incidence category (51-99 positive cases per hospital) in the United States of America. Even house pets with minimal mosquito exposure can easily be infected.

## How is the disease diagnosed?

All pets over 6 months of age should be tested **annually** per the American Heartworm Society and Companion Animal Parasite Council. Pets that have never been on heartworm prevention should have a blood test checking for microfilaria (baby heart worms) and a blood testing for the presence of the adults (antigen testing).

For pets on year round prevention, antigen testing is usually adequate.

## What are the signs of heartworm disease?

**Cats:** Acute/chronic dyspnea, chronic vomiting, coughing (rarely), acute death, lethargy and weight loss- less common.

**Dogs:** Exercise intolerance, coughing, dyspnea (difficulty breathing), increased respiration, crackles heard in the lungs, ascites (fluid in the abdomen) associated with heart failure

**Ferrets:** Lethargy, coughing, dyspnea, pulmonary congestion and pleural effusion, ascites, Caval Syndrome, posterior paresis, exercise intolerance, decreased appetite/weight loss, heart murmur, melena and sudden death can occur.

Clinical signs in ferrets resemble that of dogs but because of the ferret's size, even one adult an can be fatal

## How can heartworm disease be prevented?

- All pets **must** be tested **annually** and be negative for heartworms. Starting a pet that is positive for heartworms on prevention can produce severe, potentially fatal reactions.
- Keep your pet on one of the heartworm preventatives year round. Our recommendations for which preventative to use follows.
- If possible, keep your pet(s) indoors when mosquitoes are most active.
- Maintain good mosquito control and repellents.
- Install screens where applicable.
- Remove standing water.
- **How can heartworms be treated?**

Cats and Ferrets: Currently there is no safe, effective treatment for these species. That is why it is so important to keep these pets on year round prevention.

Dogs: Dogs can be treated with a product called Immiticide. The treatment will take several months, has several stages and requires a pretreatment evaluation (chest radiographs, blood testing, and urinalysis) prior to beginning treatment. The earlier the diagnosis is made and treatment is started, the greater the likelihood the treatment will be successful. Treatment is also significantly more expensive than monthly prevention.

The approximate cost to treat a 40 lb heartworm positive dog is \$1,157.24. The cost of prevention is between \$6.38 - \$10.28 or around \$19.78 for flea prevention as well and 0.20-0.34 cents per day.

**Please, use year-round prevention!!!**

Additional information can be obtained at [www.heartwormsociety.org/petowner-resources.faqs.html](http://www.heartwormsociety.org/petowner-resources.faqs.html)

### Monthly Heartworm and Flea Preventatives

Here is a list of the preventative heartworm and flea and tick products that we carry:

- **Trifexis** (*Dogs only*): Chewable preventative for heartworm, roundworm, hookworm, whipworm, and fleas
- **K-9 Advantage Multi** (*Dogs only*): topical preventative for heartworms, roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, fleas.
- **Interceptor** (*Dogs & Cats*): Chewable preventative for heartworm, roundworm, hookworm and whipworms.
- **Comfortis** (*Dogs only*): Chewable tablet for fleas.
- **Feline Revolution** (*Cats only*): Topical flea, roundworm, hookworm, heartworm, ear mite prevention.
- **Puppy/Kitten Revolution** (*Dogs & Cats*): Topical flea, roundworm, hookworm, heartworm, ear mite prevention. This is for pets that are under 5 lbs.