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Quick Facts on Heartworm Disease

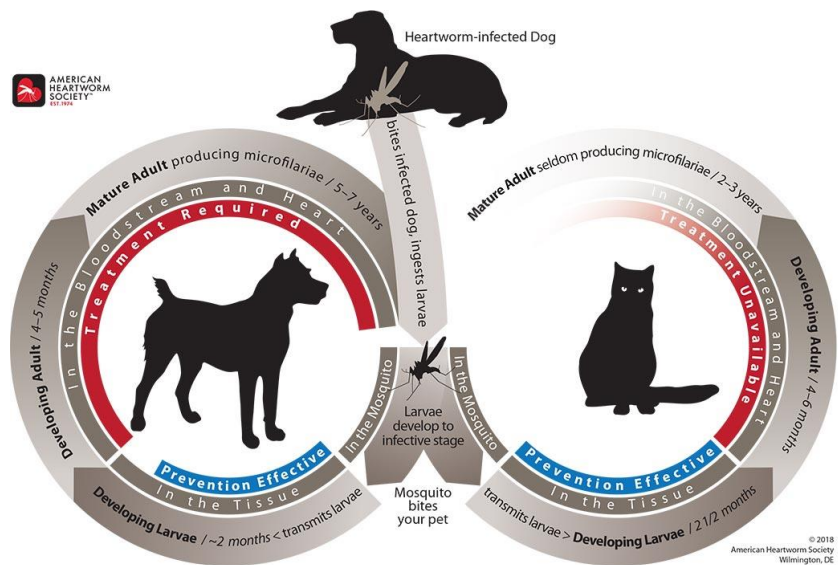
What is Heartworm Disease?

- Heartworm Disease is a life-threatening disease caused by the parasite *Dirofilaria immitis*, which can affect a number of mammals, including dogs and cats
- Heartworms can be transmitted when a mosquito infected with larvae bites your dog
- Once fully mature, these worms live predominantly in the pulmonary arteries and heart
- Heartworm disease can be fatal if left untreated

What is the Life Cycle of Heartworm?

- The cycle begins when a mosquito bites a heartworm infected dog and takes in the larval form of the heartworm, circulating microfilaria (L1), along with their blood meal

- If the environmental conditions are ideal, these larvae develop in the mosquito over the period of 2-3 weeks
- The infected mosquito then transmits the infective larvae to a dog when taking a blood meal
- When the dog has been infected, the parasite develops further, migrating to the heart and pulmonary arteries 3-4 months after infection, reaching mature adulthood and reproducing at 6-7 months after initial infection



- Left untreated, adult heartworms are thought to live, on average from 5-7 years in dogs

What are the Symptoms?

- Dogs can be asymptomatic, or can develop clinical symptoms of the disease due to the adult worms in the pulmonary vessels, lungs and heart

- Some symptoms of Heartworm disease include the following:
 - *Exercise intolerance*
 - *Mild to severe cough*
 - *Weight loss*
 - *Laboured breathing*
 - *Heart failure (e.g. abdominal swelling, heart irregularities, weight loss, fainting, & sudden death)*

Why is Heartworm Testing Recommended?

- Testing annually provides owners piece of mind knowing their pet is free of Heartworm
- If a dog is infected, annual testing ensures early diagnosis and treatment of the disease, and helps to prevent transmission of Heartworm to other dogs

When is Heartworm Testing Required?

- If there has been seasonal potential for exposure, all dogs over 6 months of age should be tested for Heartworm annually
- If monthly doses of medication were missed or given late, testing for Heartworm is necessary before starting Heartworm preventive

How is Heartworm Disease Diagnosed?

- A blood test detects proteins produced by adult female Heartworms; this test is very specific and sensitive in dogs and will provide a positive or negative result
- Radiographic (x-ray) findings in a heartworm positive dog may reveal an enlarged heart and/or abnormal pulmonary arteries

How is Heartworm Disease Prevented?

- Heartworm infection is easier to prevent than treat; treatment is not without risk, requiring close monitoring and often requires hospitalization
- Prevention of Heartworm disease can be accomplished by following the recommended guidelines for administering monthly Heartworm preventive medication
- In the province of Ontario, Heartworm preventives are administered for 6 months, beginning in June and ending in November
- Unfortunately, at this time, there are no proven natural methods to prevent heartworm that are as effective as pharmaceutical preventive medications

Source: Information adapted from Heartgard 30 HGD-14-7263-TSHEET(E)

Image: <https://www.heartwormsociety.org/veterinary-resources/client-education/heartworm-life-cycle>