

# Heartworm Disease & Prevention

## What is heartworm Disease

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease in dogs and cats. It is caused by foot-long worms that live in the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels, causing severe lung disease, heart failure and damage to other organs in the body. Wild species such as foxes and coyotes living in proximity to urban areas are considered carriers of the disease. Heartworm disease is contracted when a mosquito bites a host animal, taking baby heartworms known as microfilaria along with it. When an infected mosquito bites a domestic animal, such as a cat or dog, it deposits the tiny heartworms into the animal's bloodstream where they can move through the body.

## Heartworm Disease in Dogs

The dog is a natural host for heartworms, which means that heartworms that live inside the dog mature into adults, mate and produce offspring. If untreated, their numbers can increase, and dogs have been known to harbor several hundred worms in their bodies. Heartworm disease causes lasting damage to the heart, lungs and arteries, and can affect the dog's health and quality of life long after the parasites are gone. For this reason, heartworm prevention for dogs is by far the best option, and treatment—when needed—should be administered as early in the course of the disease as possible. It can take several months after becoming infected for a heartworm test to show a positive infection. Dogs should receive annual heartworm testing, even if they are on monthly prevention. There are many effective products for heartworm prevention. At Main Street Vet we recommend Simparica Trio once monthly because it protects against not only heartworms, but intestinal parasites, fleas and ticks.

## Heartworm Disease in Cat

Heartworm disease in cats is very different from heartworm disease in dogs. The cat is an atypical host for heartworms, and most worms in cats do not survive to the adult stage. Cats with adult heartworms typically have just one to three worms, and many cats affected by heartworms have no adult worms. While this means heartworm disease often goes undiagnosed in cats, it's important to understand that even immature worms cause damage in the form of a condition known as heartworm associated respiratory disease (HARD). Moreover, the medication used to treat heartworm infections in dogs cannot be used in cats, so prevention is the only means of protecting cats from the effects of heartworm disease. At Main Street Vet we recommend using Revolution Plus once monthly because it protects against not only heartworms, but also intestinal parasites, ear mites, fleas and ticks.

## Key Takeaways

Heartworm is a nasty disease that can lead to serious, even fatal complications in both dogs and cats. Treatment is painful, costly, and not always a cure for the many potential health complications created by heartworms. All it takes is one bite from an infected mosquito for your pet to contract heartworm disease. Mosquitos can survive even in some winter months, so monthly prevention year-round is important to protect your pet.