

DISEASES IN DOGS

HEARTWORM



What Causes It

Heartworm disease is a serious disease that results in severe lung disease, heart failure, other organ damage, and death in pets, mainly dogs, cats, and ferrets. It is caused by a parasitic worm called *Dirofilaria immitis*.

How Is It Spread?

It is spread from an affected animal to another animal by the mosquito.

The larvae of the heartworm are found in the bloodstream and can be transferred to an unaffected dog via a simple mosquito bite.

The life cycle of heartworm:-

- Adult heartworm are present in the right chamber of the affected dog's heart and the larvae are passed into the dog's blood. When a mosquito then bites the dog it sucks up the blood and larvae, with it.
- After 10 to 30 days, the larvae of the heartworm, appear in the salivary gland of the mosquito. Then, when the mosquito bites another dog, it transmits the heartworm larvae.
- The larvae then travel around the dog's body for about four months before reaching the dog's heart. Over the next three months, the larvae mature into adult heartworms and the process repeats itself.

Signs And Symptoms of the disease may include:-

- a mild persistent cough
- reluctance to exercise
- fatigue after moderate activity
- decreased appetite
- weight loss.

The disease results from the damage caused by the adult worms to the blood vessels of the dog's lungs. The worms cause the blood vessels to swell and become scarred. As the blood vessels shrink, blood flow becomes restricted and blood pressure begins to rise. Eventually, heart failure will result from the increased blood pressure.

Signs and symptoms may appear gradually over a number of years and eventually the dog's heart may fail.

British dogs could be more vulnerable as they have never encountered the disease and therefore have no resistance to it.

Treatment

Most infected dogs can be treated, but it is a complicated and expensive process, taking months for infected animals to recover. There is also a possibility that the treatment can have side-effects.

The aim is to first stabilize your dog if he is showing signs of disease, then kill all adult and immature worms while keeping the side effects of treatment to a minimum.

Prevention And Control

- Some commercial spot-ons and deltamethrin collars, would prevent the mosquito from taking blood from the dog,
- Reducing your pet's exposure to mosquitoes - This means making your pet's environment less hospitable to mosquitoes This decreases the risk of your pet being infected with heartworm in the first place.

Heartworm prevention is safe, easy and inexpensive compared to treating a dog or cat after worms have matured into adults

Prevention is covered fully in the "PREVENTION OF DISEASES IN DOGS" factsheet.