



Facts and Information

About Heartworms

Heartworm disease is very common in central Indiana afflicting many dogs and cats each year. Mosquitos carry the disease to animals in this area in most of the months of the year. The disease is caused by the heartworm, *Dirofilaria immitis*. This parasite lives in the right side of the animals heart and the nearby large vessels (pulmonary arteries). The female worm produces large numbers of microscopic, immature heartworms that circulate in the blood. These immature worms (microfilariae) are taken up with the blood by a mosquito feeding on an infected dog. After living in the mosquito for 10-14 days, the microfilariae can then infect another pet that the mosquito feeds on. The feeding mosquito deposits infective microfilariae on the skin of another animal and these enter the body through the mosquito bite wound. The microfilariae eventually travel to the heart where they develop into adult heartworms. The adult heartworms produce new microfilariae within three months. It takes at least 190 days from the time the dog is bitten by an infected mosquito until the dog becomes a new source of infective microfilariae.

Diagnosis of this dangerous disease involves nothing more than a simple blood test. This is necessary because heartworm cannot be recognized in any other way. Few symptoms occur until the worms have given the pet congestive heart failure. This is the final stage and many dogs and cats cannot be saved if the problem has advanced that far.

Failure to treat heartworm disease may result in heart failure and/or serious disease of the liver and kidneys. Treatment is difficult, expensive and sometimes unsuccessful. Therefore, screening your pet yearly and placing him or her on a preventative medicine designed to stop the worms from developing is strongly recommended by the doctor. The easy to use once monthly treats available for prevention (as well as the spot-on liquid) make it sensible to have all pets on the product year-round to protect against this all too common but preventable deadly disease.

Please ask to have your pet tested and begun on preventative as soon as possible!