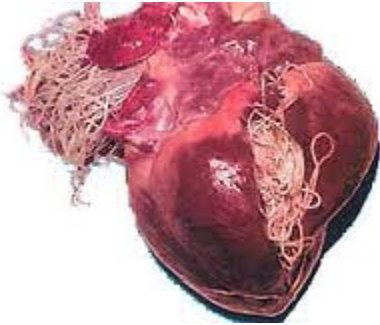


Too many of the dogs and cats that come into/surrendered to shelters are infected with heartworms. Please take care of your pets...get them tested and put them on a preventive, Please.

## What is heartworm disease?

### It IS PREVENTABLE!! Just DO IT!

**Heartworm disease is a devastating disease that starts with a single mosquito bite.**



Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease in pets in the United States and many other parts of the world. It is caused by foot-long worms (heartworms) that live in the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels of affected pets, causing severe lung disease, heart failure and damage to other organs in the body. Heartworm disease affects dogs, cats and ferrets, but heartworms also live in other mammal species, including wolves, coyotes, foxes, sea lions and—in rare instances—humans. Because wild species such as foxes and coyotes live in proximity to many urban areas, they are considered important carriers of the disease.

**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. Learn more about heartworm medicine for dogs.

**Cats.** 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 real 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 (Advantage Multi or Revolution-Available only from a Veterinarian) is the only means of protecting cats from the effects of heartworm disease. Unfortunately, there is no approved drug therapy for heartworm infection in cats, and the drug used to treat infections in dogs is not safe for cats.

## What are the signs of heartworm disease in dogs?

In the early stages of the disease, many dogs show few symptoms or no symptoms at all. The longer the infection persists, the more likely symptoms will develop. Active dogs, dogs heavily infected with heartworms, or those with other health problems often show pronounced clinical signs.

Signs of heartworm disease may include a mild persistent cough, reluctance to exercise, fatigue after moderate activity, decreased appetite, and weight loss. As heartworm disease progresses, pets may develop heart failure and the appearance of a swollen belly due to excess fluid in the abdomen. Dogs with large numbers of heartworms can develop a sudden blockages of blood flow within the heart leading to a life-threatening form of cardiovascular collapse. This is called caval syndrome, and is marked by a sudden onset of labored breathing, pale gums, and dark bloody or coffee-colored urine. Without prompt surgical removal of the heartworm blockage, few dogs survive.

## What are the signs of heartworm disease in cats?

Signs of heartworm disease in cats can be very subtle or very dramatic. Symptoms may include coughing, asthma-like attacks, periodic vomiting, lack of appetite, or weight loss. Occasionally an affected cat may have difficulty walking, experience fainting or seizures, or suffer from fluid accumulation in the abdomen. Unfortunately, the first sign in some cases is sudden collapse of the cat, or sudden death.

<https://www.heartwormsociety.org/pet-owner-resources/heartworm-basics>