

Heartworm Disease

Heartworm Disease is developed when a dog is bitten by a mosquito carrying microscopic heartworm larvae. They migrate from the bloodstream into your pet's heart and lung arteries where they often cause lung disease and heart failure. Prevention is always more safe and affordable than treating dogs with adult heartworm infections.

Signs of Heartworm Disease

Many infected dogs will go years without showing any symptoms as the heartworms slowly cause damage to the arteries of the lungs, signs of the disease may include;

- Mild, persistent cough
- Fatigue
- Decreased appetite
- Weight loss

Eventually as the lungs become more diseased, dogs can develop heart failure which is recognized as a buildup of fluid in the abdomen causing a "swollen belly" appearance.

Detecting Heartworm Infection

Annual testing is recommended for all dogs over 1 year of age as some tests cannot detect infection until heartworms are at least 7 months old. At Lincolnshire Animal Hospital we always recommend an annual test called a 4DX. This test not only tests for heartworm disease but also tick-borne diseases. We also recommend retesting your pet if there has been a lapse in their heartworm prevention.

Heartworm Treatment

A drug called Immiticide is used to kill adult heartworms. It is administered in a series of injections by your veterinarian. The most important part of treatment is REST! This is very important as the heartworms start to decompose and are carried to the lungs where they are broken down and reabsorbed through the small blood vessels and back into the body. This can take weeks to around a month and is a dangerous period in your pet's treatment. Your pet should be kept quiet with no exercise as to make things easier on the lungs as the heartworms decompose.

Heartworm Prevention

The best way to eliminate the risk of heartworm infection is to institute a year-round prevention program. Heartworm preventatives (such as Heartgard Plus, Sentinel, or Simparica Trio) are very effective when given properly and on a timely schedule. Approved preventatives are highly effective, safe and easy to use. Preventatives are much more affordable than treatment. Speak to your pet's veterinarian to make sure they are on a proper heartworm preventative!