



Heartworm Disease in Dogs

Heartworm is a deadly parasite spread by mosquitoes. Left undetected, it causes lung disease, heart failure, and other major organ damage. Testing is the only way to know if your dogs have it.



“Silent” Infection

Adult worms and their microscopic offspring live in the blood stream of infected dogs. Mosquitoes pick up the offspring when they bite (feed from) an infected dog and carry them to the next dog they bite. These tiny offspring grow into large adult worms that can range from 6 to 12 inches in length. As the worms grow and reproduce, they interfere with blood flow throughout the dog’s body.

This happens silently over time. Most dogs don’t show symptoms until the infection is advanced.



Symptoms and Treatment

Symptoms usually don’t show up until late stages of infection. Dogs may have a dry, persistent cough; difficulty breathing; decreased activity; loss of appetite; and weight loss.

Treatments require hospitalization and are often expensive and time consuming. More serious cases require surgery to physically remove the adult worms from the dog’s heart and blood vessels.



Photo: MUHAMMED RAIHAN PA - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=51618940>

How To Protect Your Dogs

All dogs are at risk. It only takes one mosquito to infect a dog with heartworm and spread it to multiple dogs in your kennel.

Dogs can get infected year-round, and they’re at risk whether housed outdoors or inside. Important steps to protect your dogs include:

- 1. ROUTINE TESTING.** Your veterinarian can detect heartworm disease with a quick blood test at annual checkups. Finding the disease early is critical for effective treatment and to minimize spread to other dogs.
- 2. PREVENTIVE CARE.** Heartworm is very easy to prevent with medication. Ask your veterinarian about available options.
- 3. KEEP MOSQUITOES AWAY.** You can get rid of standing water at your property, use screens on windows, and take other proactive steps to control mosquitoes and minimize your dogs’ exposure.

DID YOU KNOW?

The mosquitoes that spread heartworm are commonly found indoors, even during the winter.



ANIMAL CARE AID

