

There is no such thing as a Heartworm free neighborhood

Heartworm disease is a serious threat to our pets and continues to be a concern throughout Florida year-round. Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes, which means any time of year these pesky bugs are active and feeding, putting your pets at risk. Peak mosquito season in Florida is right now! High humidity and afternoon thunderstorms create favorable conditions for mosquitoes. The more of these hungry mosquitoes that are in an area, the more your pets are at risk for contracting heartworms.

The heartworm lifecycle is multifaceted. Adult female heartworms living in the heart of an infected dog produce baby worms called microfilaria that live in the bloodstream. When a mosquito takes a blood meal, it ingests these baby worms which then develop into an infective larval stage over the next few weeks. When the infected mosquito bites an unsuspecting dog, it passes larvae through its bite into the host. Once inside a new host, the lifecycle will take about 6 months for the larvae to mature and find their way to the heart and lungs where they can live for up to 5 years, causing damage to your pets internal organs.

Dogs are not the only ones susceptible to heartworm disease; cats and ferrets are also at risk. Even indoor only pets aren't off the hook! It just takes one bite from one infected mosquito to transmit heartworm disease. This means that every time you open a door or window, the potential for these irritating insects to invite themselves in and attack your pets is possible.

Heartworm disease has been diagnosed in all 50 states with Florida being one with a higher number of confirmed cases annually. Therefore, the American Heartworm Society recommends testing your pets every 12 months and keeping them on prevention year-round. Even if your pets are on regular prevention, testing is still recommended to ensure your pet's preventive regimen has been effective. While medications are effective, if you miss a dose or give it late, it could leave your pets at risk for infection.

Is your pet on heartworm prevention? Your veterinarian can help find the medication that is right for your pet. There are many options from oral to injectable that can fit your lifestyle, giving you peace of mind that your pets are protected from this potentially fatal disease. And don't forget, many heartworm preventions contain a dewormer that helps keep your pets free of certain intestinal parasites too.

There is no such thing as a heartworm free neighborhood, but with the help of your veterinarian, you can have a heartworm free pet!

-Liz Bigelow (Certified Veterinary Technician)

-Dr. Lockwood (Owner of Crosswinds Veterinary Hospital)