

Clinical signs in Dogs

In the early stages of Heartworm disease, many dogs show few to no symptoms. The longer the infection persists, the more symptoms will develop; with active dogs, heavily infected dogs, and those with other health problems showing more pronounced signs.

Signs of heartworm disease may include a persistent cough, reluctance to exercise, fatigue after moderate activity, decreased appetite, and weight loss. As heartworm disease progresses, pets may develop heart failure, with a chronic wet cough or a swollen belly due to excess fluid.

Dogs with large numbers of heartworms can develop sudden blockages of blood flow within the heart leading to a life-threatening form of cardiovascular collapse. This is marked by a sudden onset of labored breathing, pale gums, and dark bloody or coffee-colored urine. Without prompt removal of the heartworm blockage, few dogs survive.

Clinical Signs 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 can be sudden collapse, respiratory distress or death.

What do I need to know about heartworm testing?

Heartworm disease is a serious, progressive disease. The earlier it is detected, the better the chances the pet will recover. Since there are few early signs of disease, detecting their presence with a heartworm test administered by a veterinarian is important. The test requires just a small blood sample from your pet, and it works by detecting the presence of heartworm proteins. Some veterinarians process heartworm tests right in their hospitals while others send the samples to a diagnostic laboratory. In either case, results are obtained quickly. If your pet tests positive, further tests may be ordered.

How Does Preventative Work?

Heartworm preventative kill any existing immature heartworms introduced to the dog by a mosquito bite over the past 30 days. It does not work against those introduced after it has been consumed—that's the work of the next dose, which should be given 30 days later.

FAQs

1. Why does my dog need to be tested every year if they have been on year round heartworm prevention?

Like all nasty parasites, heartworms can evolve to be resistant to some current heartworm medication. Also, pets can vomit and lose a dose of prevention. Finally, annual testing is needed to maintain the manufacture guarantee. By annually testing, your veterinarian can make sure that Fluffy stays negative.

2. When can my puppy or kitten start on heartworm prevention?

Usually at 6 to 8 weeks of age. The dosage of a heartworm medication is based on body weight, not age. Although, young animals do grow quickly and may need to be switched to a large size of heartworm medication.

3. Is there an effective natural or over the counter preventative for heartworm?

No, only heartworm prevention products that are tested and proven effective by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and prescribed by a veterinarian should be used.

4. What should I do if I missed a couple months of preventative?

You need to consult your veterinarian, and immediately re-start your dog on monthly preventive—then retest your dog 6 months later. The reason for re-testing is that heartworms must be approximately 6 months old before the dog will test positive.

5. What is my pet's risk for heartworm?

Heartworm has been found in every state from Minnesota to Florida and everywhere in between. Because mosquitoes can enter houses even indoor pets are at risk of heartworm.

The risk of puppies and kittens getting heartworm disease is equal to that of adult pets. The American Heartworm Society recommends that puppies and kittens be started on a heartworm preventive as early as the product label allows, and no later than 8 weeks of age.

For further information please go to [The American Heartworm Society](#)