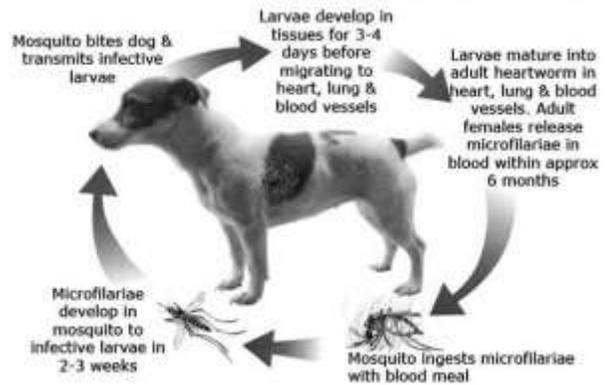


## Why your pet NEEDS monthly heartworm prevention

### What exactly is heartworm disease?

- Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal condition in dogs
- It is caused by worms that spend their adult lives on the right side of the heart and the large blood vessels that connect the heart to the lungs
- It is transmitted through infected mosquito bites
- Dogs of all ages are susceptible to infection
- Signs range from no sign at all to persistent cough, fatigue, fainting and weight loss
- Heartworm disease is usually detected with a yearly blood test
- Treatment is expensive for the owner, and a painful, prolonged ordeal for the dog
- Prevention of heartworm disease is recommended versus heartworm disease treatment



**Heartworm disease in dogs (dirofilariasis) is a serious and potentially fatal disease. Heartworms spend their adult lives in the pulmonary arteries. The adult worms can cause lasting damage to the heart, lungs and arteries. Left untreated, heartworm disease can result in loss of consciousness and death.**

### How do dogs get heartworms?

**One mosquito is all it takes to transmit heartworm disease to your dog.** Heartworm larvae are transmitted by infected mosquitoes. When the infected mosquito bites, the larvae pass through the tissue into the bloodstream. 70 days later they reach the arteries of the lungs where they continue to develop and grow. Once they arrive in the lungs, at 70 days post-infection, they can start to do damage.

Heartworms are transmitted from one dog to another by mosquitoes, which pick up tiny immature heartworms, called microfilariae, when they bite an infected dog. Larvae develop and are then transmitted to another dog when that dog is bitten by the infected mosquito.

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## **Where are dogs at risk for heartworm infection?**

**All dogs are at risk for heartworm disease**, no matter where they live—heartworms don't discriminate based on geography. Indoor dogs are also at risk because mosquitoes can enter the home. In the past, heartworm disease in the United States was primarily limited to the South and Southeast regions. However, it is now found in all 50 states, in Canada, and is spreading to new areas each year. The American Heartworm Society notes that uncared-for dogs and certain wildlife can be carriers of heartworms. Mosquitoes blown great distances by the wind and the transportation of infected pets to different geographic locations can all contribute to the spread of heartworm disease.

## **How are dogs tested for heartworm infection?**

The most common method for heartworm testing is for a veterinarian to collect a small blood sample from a dog and evaluate the sample using a specialized test kit to detect the presence of adult heartworms.

## **Why is yearly heartworm testing necessary?**

Annual testing is necessary, even when dogs are on heartworm prevention year-round, to ensure that the prevention program is working. Heartworm medications are highly effective, but dogs can still become infected. If you miss just one dose of a monthly medication—or give it late—it can leave your dog unprotected. Even if you give the medication as recommended, your dog may spit out or vomit a heartworm pill—or rub off a topical medication. Heartworm preventives are highly effective, but not 100 percent effective. If you don't get your dog tested, you won't know your dog needs treatment.

## **How can heartworm disease in dogs be prevented?**

Pet owners can use oral or topical heartworm medications that need to be given every 30 days. Heartworm preventatives kill larval stages of heartworms and help prevent them from developing into adults and causing heartworm disease. In an unprotected dog, heartworm larvae mature into adults and ultimately migrate to the heart and lungs. Although it is possible to treat heartworm disease if a dog becomes infected, it is difficult, expensive and risky, particularly in dogs that have begun to exhibit clinical signs of infection.

## **How long do I have to give my dog heartworm prevention medication?**

Monthly use of heartworm prevention medications is essential because it cannot be determined with certainty when the threat of mosquitoes has passed. Mosquitoes can emerge even during winter months if the conditions are right. Many heartworm preventive medications also control common intestinal parasites which can pose a risk to human family members.