

Cats Get Heartworms, Too!



- Veterinarians have been aware of the potential effects of heartworm disease in cats since the first diagnosis in the 1920's.
- Few pet owners are aware that the canine heartworm parasite can also affect cats.
- Neither a reliable test nor a safe treatment exists for cats.
- Prevention - the only way to keep your cat free of heartworm disease.



CAUSE

- Feline heartworm disease is caused by the same parasite that causes the disease in dogs.
- Heartworm is transmitted by mosquito bite to a dog or cat.
- Unlike the dog, the cat is a dead-end host (larvae grow up to be adults, but the adults die before producing more young larvae able to perpetuate the disease in other cats.)



PREVALENCE

- Feline heartworm exposure may range from 5% to 33%.
- Indoor cats are also at a high risk for developing adult heartworms.
- One study shows that an estimated 27% of cats exposed to feline heartworm were kept exclusively indoors.
- Based on the safety and relatively low cost of the preventative, we recommend the use of a monthly medication for all cats.

CLINICAL SIGNS (symptoms)

- The signs of heartworm disease in cats are different than those seen in the dog.
- In cats, the most common signs are a sudden difficulty in breathing, (in some cases, misdiagnosed as asthma), coughing, chronic vomiting and sudden unexplained death.



DIAGNOSIS

- Unlike canine heartworm disease, there is currently no reliable test for feline heartworm available.
- Diagnosis of feline heartworm disease usually involves a combination of physical exam findings, blood tests, x-rays, echocardiography (an ultrasound exam of the heart) and a post-mortem exam.



TREATMENT

- Currently, there is no approved or safe treatment for a cat that has heartworm disease, so we treat the signs associated with the disease and wait for the adult heartworms to die.
- This waiting and watching period can be a very tense time.



PREVENTION

- Since indoor cats are at risk as well, it is just as important to protect the indoor as well as the outdoor cat from heartworm disease by use of the preventative.
- No pre-prevention tests are required. Preventative is safe to use even in a cat that has existing heartworm disease.
- The feline preventative consists of a one-a-month topical applied high on the back of the neck.
- It is safe and will effectively prevent heartworm disease, in addition to treating and preventing fleas, flea development, ear-mites, hookworms, and roundworms in your cat.