

HEARTWORM DISEASE (AGAIN)

I apologize for duplicating the article that I wrote in May, but it bears repeating, because I still encounter many people who do not have their dogs on prevention. Last month, in our hospital, a patient tested positive for heartworm disease and is currently undergoing treatment. This treatment has proven to be very costly for the dog's owner and quite an ordeal for the dog.

The month of May marks the commencement of mosquito and flea season. Mosquitoes can harbour a larval parasite called *Dirofilaria immitis*, more commonly known as heartworm.

When an infected mosquito bites a dog, it injects larvae into that individual's bloodstream. These larvae then mature into large worms, which invade the hosts heart and lungs.

Heartworm disease is fatal if not treated, however the treatment is very costly and can be harmful to the individual being treated.

On the other hand, heartworm disease is a very preventable and the prevention is inexpensive.

Dogs should have a blood test to ensure that they are not harbouring any heartworm larvae in their blood stream and then started on a monthly preventative program. There are many products available, ranging from topical to oral preparations. Some products just prevent heartworm disease, while others prevent other parasites such as fleas, mange and ear mites and intestinal parasites.

Since Hurricane Katrina, many homeless dogs have been rescued and brought to this province (mainly Hamilton) to be adopted. Most of these dogs arrived here with heartworm disease. This has caused a significant increase in the incidence, over the past few years, of heartworm disease in dogs native to this area. Also, there is a reservoir of "unprotected dogs", namely coyotes.

My advice is that all dogs be on prevention from the month of May to November, in this climate. If you plan to travel south with your dog, in the winter, then he or she should be on prevention year round, as southern warmer climates have mosquitoes year round.

In recent years, in Ontario, heartworm disease has also been documented in cats. The reliability of the feline heartworm test remains questionable, but is available. Regardless, I feel that all cats that go outdoors should be on prevention as well.

For more info, the American Heartworm Society has an excellent website.

REMEMBER, HEARTWORM DISEASE PREVENTION IS A SIMPLE, SAFE AND INEXPENSIVE ALTERNATIVE TO TREATING THE DISEASE ITSELF..

