



BURKE COUNTY ANIMAL HOSPITAL

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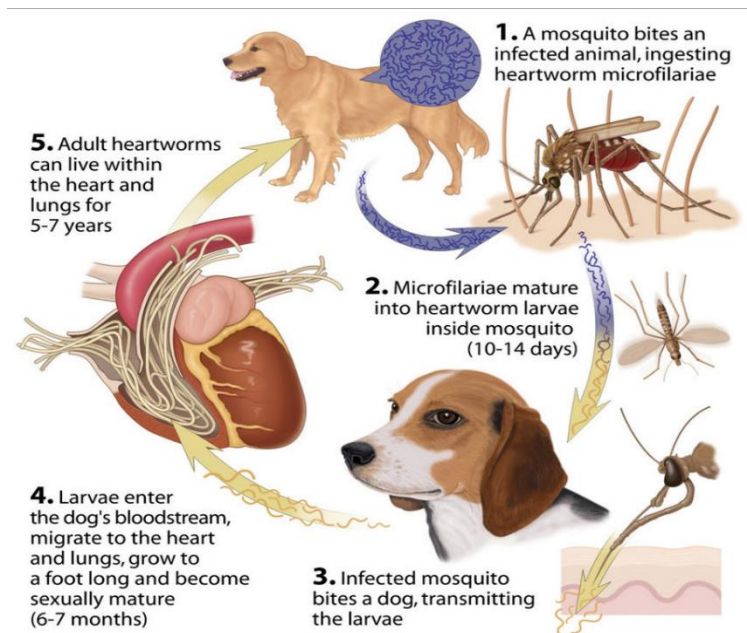
Heartworm Treatment in Canines

What is heartworm disease?

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease caused by the parasite *Dirofilaria immitis*, which is transmitted by mosquitos. These parasitic worms (which look like strands of cooked spaghetti in the heart) can be up to 1 foot in length and reside in the heart, lungs, and surrounding blood vessels. Left untreated, they cause severe lung damage and eventually heart failure. Some signs of heartworm disease in dogs include coughing, reluctance to exercise, fatigue after moderate activity, decreased appetite, and weight loss. Progressive disease can also cause signs of heart failure which include a swollen distended abdomen, coffee-colored urine, labored breathing, and pale gums.

How can heartworm disease be prevented?

Heartworm disease is easily prevented with monthly heartworm prevention pills or topicals that you can get from your veterinarian. It is important to remember to give them to your dog every month, year-round for full protection. One box of preventive typically provides 6 months of protection, so make sure to keep it refilled. You can also make it easier to remember by purchasing a year's supply of heartworm prevention. Heartworm prevention pills also have the added benefit of protecting against intestinal worms.



My dog has been diagnosed with heartworms; Now what?

There are 2 options for managing heartworm disease in dogs:

Fast-Kill Method: (Estimated \$500-\$900+ Depending on patient size)

This is the Gold-Standard and preferred method for quickly killing heartworms in most patients, as recommended by the American Heartworm Society. Heartworms are typically eliminated by 6 months using this method (sometimes sooner).

1. Doxycycline antibiotic twice a day for 30 days duration. This antibiotic kills bacteria that the heartworms can carry, makes heartworms weaker and more susceptible to treatment, and has the added benefit of reducing inflammation.
2. Heartworm prevention. Advantage Multi is a safe heartworm preventative for heartworm positive dogs to begin. It must be given monthly, year-round to be effective.
3. Heartworm Injection #1: This must be scheduled for 1 month after starting the Doxycycline antibiotic. Your pet will receive an injection of melarsomine, which is a drug that kills adult heartworms. Your pet will board in-hospital for 1 night to monitor for complications following the injection.
4. Heartworm Injections #2 and #3: One month after the first injection, 2 additional injections of melarsomine are given, 24 hours apart. Your pet will board in-hospital for 2 nights to monitor for complications following the injections.
5. Strict Rest: The most important thing you can do to minimize complications during treatment is to restrict your pet's exercise before, during, and after the heartworm injections for a minimum of 3 months. When the adult worms die, you want to prevent excessive exercise. This is to help reduce the risk of obstructed blood flow that the dead worms could cause. If you need medications to help keep your dog calm during this period, please let us know.

Slow-Kill Method: (Estimated \$130-\$150)

This method may be chosen in older or otherwise immune-compromised pets. It can take 10 months to 2 years for heartworms to be eliminated using this method.

1. Doxycycline antibiotic twice a day for 30 days duration. This antibiotic kills bacteria that the heartworms can carry, makes heartworms weaker and more susceptible to treatment, and has the added benefit of reducing inflammation.
2. Heartworm prevention. Advantage Multi is a safe heartworm preventative for heartworm positive dogs to begin. It must be given monthly, year-round to be effective.

Next Steps:

Your pet will be tested for heartworms again in 6 months. If your dog starts breathing heavily or coughing at any time, bring him/her in immediately for an exam and further treatment.