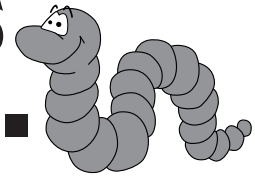


Heartworms are Being Found More Frequently in CATS



Heartworms are less common in cats than in dogs, but cats can get them too. Affected cats usually have only a few of these worms in their heart, but because the cat's heart is very small and the worms are quite large, even 1 or 2 worms can be fatal. Signs of heartworm disease in cats include chronic coughing, wheezing or vomiting, and sudden collapse or death. The disease has usually been diagnosed after death with a necropsy (animal autopsy) because there was no blood test for heartworm disease in cats. There is still no effective treatment for cats that have heartworm disease but there is now a blood test to detect these parasites in cats, and several once a month preventative medications.

Outdoor cats are most at risk, but interestingly enough a study of feline heartworm disease in Texas and South Carolina showed that 36% of infected cats were kept totally indoors. Since it takes so few of the heartworm parasites to cause disease in cats, even the occasional mosquito finding its way into the home can carry more than enough heartworm larvae to be fatal.

Luckily, cats can now be put on the once a month preventative medication during the mosquito season, just like dogs. Though effective preventative medications have been available for dogs for years, more than 1/3 of dogs in our area are not being protected. Many of them are harboring the heartworm parasite. Mosquitoes then carry the disease from infected dogs to other pets, and occasionally to people as well.

Heartgard® for cats is a chewable, good tasting tablet your cat should like. The price is quite reasonable, and the medication also helps prevent roundworms and hookworms - common intestinal parasites - as well. There is another brand of chewable medication, Interceptor®, if your cat dislikes Heartgard, and a topical ointment preventative as well.

Cats are exposed to lots of other diseases, so you need to decide on a total health care package for any cat, especially one that goes outside. We recommend vaccination for Distemper, the upper respiratory diseases and Rabies for all cats, indoors or out. Feline Leukemia vaccination is also recommended. Cats going outdoors should also be protected against FIP, fleas and intestinal parasites as part of a regular health care program. If you have a cat who is special to you, you will want to start him or her on heartworm preventative medication as well. It could save a life!

