



## Heartworm Testing & Prevention Recommendations

The veterinarians and staff at Veterinary Wellness Center recommend that each dog and cat be protected from heartworm disease **throughout the entire year**. Heartworm prevention also decreases your pet's risk of carrying **intestinal parasites which can be transmitted to people**, especially children.

Dogs should also be tested for heartworms **at least once a year**, or more often if any doses have been missed or when switching types of prevention. Testing is less accurate in cats, but is recommended if they show signs of illness.

Heartworm preventive medications are **nearly 100% effective when correctly administered** on schedule. However, if doses are late, forgotten, spit out, or not fully absorbed, then your pet may be at risk of developing heartworm disease. Annual testing provides peace of mind for dogs that do not have heartworms, and early detection for dogs that do have heartworms so they can fully benefit from adulticide treatment **before permanent damage occurs**.

Dogs that have an undiagnosed heartworm infection could develop severe reactions if they are started on prevention without additional treatment.

It is the manufacturer's recommendation to test annually prior to prescribing preventive medication, when switching the type of prevention, and 7 months after starting or changing prevention.

### Key takeaways:

- >> Prevent heartworms at all times!
- >> Dogs and cats are at risk of contracting heartworm disease.
- >> Heartworm disease can cause death.
- >> Treatment for dogs with heartworm disease can cost \$1,000-1,500 or more.
- >> Treatment for dogs with heartworm disease is not guaranteed to stop or reverse damage to the heart.





## Test your Heartworm knowledge!

Take the quiz then check your answers below.

- TRUE / FALSE Dogs that are on heartworm prevention don't need to be tested for heartworms.
- TRUE / FALSE Heartworm prevention is highly effective in preventing heartworm infections.
- TRUE / FALSE No dog or cat parasites can be transmitted to people.
- TRUE / FALSE Pets only need heartworm prevention during the summer.
- TRUE / FALSE Pets that get heartworms can develop permanent heart and lung damage before clinical signs are seen.

### Did you know?

Heartworms are **transmitted by mosquitoes**. Dogs are the natural host for heartworms, and have the highest risk of developing heartworm infections and heartworm disease. Heartworm disease can cause significant injury to the heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys and can lead to death. Cats can also get heartworms, but people cannot.



Due to our mild climate, the Rio Grande Valley is a high-risk location for heartworm disease. Mosquitoes can get inside easily, so prevention is **equally important for indoor pets** and outdoor pets.

For your convenience, we offer several types of heartworm prevention including **injection, chewable, and topical**. Please ask one of our staff members for a customized prevention recommendation.

Most dogs that get heartworms **do not show clinical signs** until permanent damage has occurred in the heart or lungs, at which time it may be too late to treat.

Heartworm prevention requires low doses of medication, making these products **very safe** for dogs. Even dogs that have the MDR-1 genetic mutation that increases sensitivity to certain medications can be on heartworm prevention.

It takes **7 months** from the time a dog is bitten by a mosquito until a blood test can accurately detect the presence of adult female heartworms. Therefore it is important to test again 7 months after missing doses or switching prevention to confirm that your dog does not have heartworms.

**Treatment for canine heartworm disease is expensive** and can have serious side effects. There is always a risk of permanent heart damage occurring in a dog that has any stage of heartworm disease.

There is **no treatment available** for cats with adult heartworms, only prevention.

ANSWERS: False, True, False, False, True

