

Canine vs Feline Heartworm Infections

DOGS	CATS
Dogs are definitive hosts. Most (if not all) dogs exposed to heartworm infected mosquitoes will develop adult heartworm infections	Cats are atypical hosts. Many fewer cats than dogs that are exposed to infected mosquitoes develop adult heartworm infections
Most immature heartworms in the lungs of dogs go on to mature into adult heartworms	It is thought that many immature heartworms in the lungs of cats fail to mature to adult heartworms
Infected dogs often harbor more than 30 adult worms	Infected cats usually harbor fewer than 6 adult worms (1-3 most common)
Adult worms are thought to live up to 5 years in dogs	Adult worms probably live 2 years or less in cats
Most dogs that do not receive adulticide or preventive medications develop Microfilaria. Microfilaremia can persist for many months.	Only 50% of cats develop circulating microfilaria. These may persist for 1-2 months
Canine heartworm disease, particularly severe forms, affects both the heart and lungs	Feline heartworm disease affects the lungs much more often than the heart.
Approved adulticides are available to remove adult heartworms in dogs.	Generally, only symptomatic treatment is practiced in cats. Approved adulticides are lacking; use of canine adulticides is generally not recommended.

Understanding feline heartworm disease (the skinny version)

Cause:

Mosquitoes transfer worm larvae from an infected animal, usually a dog or wildlife, to a cat. The larvae develop into worms that live in the cat's circulatory system.

Most common signs of infection:

No signs at first, then possibly:

- lethargy
- mild, intermittent cough
- asthma-like symptoms
- vomiting/diarrhea
- increased respiratory rate
- reduced appetite
- weight loss

Disease progression if left undetected or untreated:

Respiratory distress, seizures, death

Diagnosis:

Heartworm infection can be challenging to diagnose. It may be necessary to run multiple diagnostic tests. (blood chemistry, radiographs, for example)

Treatment:

Medical treatment for respiratory symptoms and supportive care aimed at reducing symptoms dependant upon severity of disease.

Prevention:

Monthly preventive ie: Advantage Multi for Cats, Topical solution (prevents Heartworm disease, fleas, hook worms, round worms, and ear mites)



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