

Are Heartworms really a big deal?

The team at South Anderson Veterinary Clinic is dedicated to educating you about heartworms and to keeping your pet protected from them. Heartworms cause irreparable damage to the heart and lungs that can lead to many dangerous consequences, including heart failure. Heartworms are transmitted to your pet, dog or cat, by mosquitoes. There are at least 70 species of mosquitoes that are capable of carrying the heartworm larvae. It only takes one bite from a mosquito to cause infection in your pet. As soon as an infected mosquito bites an animal, the heartworm larvae are transmitted to the animal's bloodstream where the larvae travel around in the blood circulation and mature. They eventually end up in the heart or the vessels in the lungs, where they cause serious damage.

Heartworm treatment is difficult and dangerous for dogs, and there is no available treatment for cats. If the condition is left untreated in dogs, it will progress to congestive heart failure and even death. In cats, many common respiratory problems have been linked to heartworms, and unfortunately, the first sign of heartworm disease in cats is often death. It can take just one adult heartworm to lead to death in a cat.

But there is good news! This disease can be easily prevented. The heartworm preventative products that we sell here at South Anderson Veterinary Clinic are effective and easy to administer to your pets. Purchasing these preventatives on a regular basis is much more cost effective than treating your pet after they have already become infected. A yearly heartworm test should also be included in your pet's prevention plan.

The American Heartworm Society recommends testing dogs at least once per year. This is because the preventatives work retroactively. This means when you give your pet its preventative medication, that dose eliminates heartworm larvae from any infection your pet was exposed to in the previous month. So if you miss giving a dose, enough time can lapse for the heartworm larvae to mature past the level where the preventatives can affect them. At this stage in their life cycle, the heartworms cannot be detected through testing either. Once they mature to adulthood, they can then be detected with a heartworm test, and treatment can begin before the condition can progress further. When you allow us to perform a heartworm test every year, we can catch the disease before the heartworms are able to cause any extensive damage to your pet's heart and lungs. By continually keeping your pet on preventatives and yearly testing, we hope to keep your pet as healthy as possible. Please ask any of us at South Anderson Veterinary Clinic about testing and preventatives. We are here to help you and your precious pet!

