



New Hope Veterinary Clinic



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HEARTWORM DISEASE

Heartworm disease is a serious problem in dogs, with the potential to cause heart failure and death in affected animals. Fortunately, it is easily prevented. Please use this information to help you decide which manner of prevention works best for you and your pet.

What causes heartworm disease?

Heartworm disease is caused by a roundworm parasite which grows inside the heart and extends into the blood vessels leading to the lungs.

How does my dog get heartworms?

The mosquito is responsible for spreading this parasite. When a mosquito bites an infected dog, it picks up a microfilaria (the immature larval form of the worm) and puts this “young” heartworm into another dog the next time it feeds. That “young” heartworm then grows to be an adult inside the dog’s heart

What are the signs of heartworm disease?

While some dogs show obvious signs of heartworm infection, such as exercise intolerance, chronic coughing, or shortness of breath, others show no signs. The severity of signs depends on how many worms are living in the heart and how long the worms have been present.

How can I tell if my dog has heartworms?

While we often use fecal samples to test for *intestinal* worms, since the heartworm lives in the blood we must use a blood test to determine if heartworms are present in your dog. This test uses just a few drops of blood and can be run in the clinic in about five minutes. This test detects microscopic heartworm antigens in the blood and is the most sensitive test that can be run. Unfortunately, no test can determine a heartworm infection that has been present for less than six months.

When should I have my dog tested?

All adult dogs should be tested prior to using a preventative. Puppies should be started on preventative at two to three months of age. Exactly when to test is determined by which preventative is used.

How can I prevent my dog from heartworms?

Prevention is available as a monthly chewable tablet. The monthly chewable tablet kills heartworm microfilaria and larvae that may be in the dog. This tablet also kills roundworms and hookworms. This can be used year-round for those that do not wish to test annually (testing every three years is adequate if tablets are given every month year-round). These tablets can also be used seasonally by having the dog tested in the spring and giving the tablet from June through November.