

# Cleary Lake Veterinary Hospital

## Newsletter

Small Animal Edition

April 2009

### Heartworm Risk Rises with Spring Temperatures

Spring at last! As temperatures grow warmer, it's time for all of us to prepare for mosquito season and the risk of heartworm disease it brings for our pets. Not surprisingly, pets that live outdoors are more likely to get heartworm disease than indoor pets.

Unfortunately this fact can lull some pet owners into a false sense of security. "My pets never go outdoors," they say, "so they don't need heartworm preventative." It only takes one mosquito to infect a pet. Heartworm disease has been diagnosed in all 50 states, and the Mississippi River Basin is considered a particularly endemic area. Heartworms (*Dirofilaria immitis*) are spread through the bite of a mosquito carrying infective heartworm larvae. The larvae travel in a pet's body, reaching the heart and blood vessels of the lungs in about 6 months. They release immature worms (called microfilaria) into the blood. When another mosquito bites an infected dog it takes the microfilaria with the blood. The microfilaria undergo further development and become infective heartworm larvae, ready to take up residence in the next pet the mosquito attacks.

Many people are surprised to learn that cats, like dogs, are susceptible to heartworm disease. Cats are not a natural host for this parasite, therefore heartworms don't grow as large and cannot reproduce in a cats heart. Unfortunately this does not mean heartworm disease is any less deadly to the cat than to the dog. Heartworm disease, especially in later stages, can be brutal.

Affected animals suffer from coughing, difficulty breathing, weight loss, muscle wasting, and anemia (low red-blood cell count). Ultimately untreated pets die from a condition called congestive heart failure. Before they pass away, dogs can spend up to several years serving as a source of infection for other pets.

Heartworm disease treatment is available for dogs, but not cats. Sadly curing heartworm disease is costly, time-consuming and can be hard on your dog's body. At best, treatment usually causes muscle pain and sluggishness. Sometimes life-threatening blood clots to the lungs and blood clotting disorders can occur. In cats, killing adult heartworms is not an option, so therapy focuses on making the cat more comfortable while living with the disease.

Fortunately there are many affordable options for preventing heartworm disease. Monthly chewable tablets as well as topical products are available for dogs and cats. These medications interrupt heartworm development. Many of these medicines also treat other common parasites, such as roundworms or fleas. The American Heartworm Society ([www.heartwormsociety.org](http://www.heartwormsociety.org)) currently recommends administering year round prevention to pets even in colder climates.

Please contact us if you have questions.

-Ann Korbel, DVM

Collars and tags are always a good idea, but they can be lost or removed. Permanent tamper-proof identification in the form of a microchip can easily be implanted under the skin. This is done in the exam room and causes no more discomfort than a typical vaccination. Lost animals that are found to have a microchip can easily be identified and quickly returned to their family.

Have you checked out our website? It has more articles, an online store, and if you take our online survey you can receive \$5.00 off your next visit!  
[www.clearylakevets.com](http://www.clearylakevets.com)

**(Not So)  
Fun Fact**  
In dogs adult heartworms can reach a foot long!

**Have you checked out our special on Frontline Plus?  
Buy 6 doses get 1 free!**

**Every 12 month purchase of Heartgard Plus or Iverhart Max receive a \$5.00 mail in rebate that we process for you!**

Every time you're out with your dog are you asking yourself "Am I walking the dog? -OR- Is the dog walking me?" Tired of feeling like you're arm is going to be ripped from it's socket? Check out the *Gebtle Leader HeadCollar System*

**Spring has sprung, and love is in the air!**  
**Keep your four-legged companions baby free!**  
**Schedule your pet's spay or neuter appointment today!**