

MILLWOOD



ANIMAL CLINIC

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The Scoop

Heartworm disease in Dogs and Cats

Heartworms are parasites that live in the hearts and lungs of infected animals. The resulting heartworm disease can cause serious health problems and can eventually lead to heart failure and death.

Heartworm disease in Eastern Washington has historically been a very rare problem. In many areas of the country heartworm disease is widespread. The Mississippi Valley, Missouri Valley, East coast, Southern States and the Midwest are most affected. Parts of the Rocky Mountain States, California and Oregon have had outbreaks.

Recently, three cases were diagnosed in Liberty Lake, Washington. All three pets, one dog and two cats, were from the same household. These cases are a cause for concern locally. With our urban growth the past few years, many people have moved to this area from other parts of the country. This influx can predispose new disease problems entering the state.

The transmission cycle of the heartworm begins when a mosquito bites an infected animal and feeds on blood that contains tiny immature heartworms. As it feeds, the mosquito takes in the immature heartworms. During the next two to three weeks, these tiny worms develop into larvae (the infective stage of heartworms) within the mosquito. If the infected mosquito bites another dog or puppy, it can transmit infective larvae to that healthy animal. Infective larvae enter the dogs' body through the mosquito bite, and they continue to develop over the next few months. They migrate through the dog's tissues, eventually reaching the heart and lungs. Once in the dog's heart, the worms may grow to between 7 and 11 inches in length and can cause significant damage to the heart and lungs. If left untreated, heartworm disease may result in death. The life cycle of the heartworm is approximately 6 months.

Prevention

Young puppies and kittens may be put on heartworm preventative safely without a screening blood test. We can discuss this on a case-by-case basis depending upon the age and mosquito exposure possibilities. Adult dogs and cats should have the simple blood test to rule out previous exposure to heartworm disease before preventative medication is started. If no exposure has occurred, your pet is started on a simple once a month preventative.

