

# The Invisible Threat to Your Pet: How to Prevent Heartworm Disease

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EDWARDSVILLE – As social distancing restrictions continue to lift and the weather finally starts to warm up, we'll be spending more time outdoors and in public with our

furry friends. But every time you visit the dog park with your pooch, bring them to the local farmer's market, or even play catch in the backyard, you could be putting your pet's health at risk if they're not fully protected against heartworm disease.

The Midwestern mosquitoes that bug us every summer can be extremely dangerous—and even deadly—to our dogs and cats by transmitting heartworms into their bloodstream. In fact, one in 200 dogs are infected with heartworm each year, but many owners don't realize it until it's too late. However, with one monthly treatment or twice-yearly injections, your pet can play outside all summer and stay safe all year long.

### **Why Metro East pets are at a greater risk for heartworm**

While pets can become infected anywhere in the country, Madison County's humid, muggy summers and close proximity to ponds and rivers make us a prime breeding ground for mosquitoes. When a mosquito bites a mammal infected with heartworm, it becomes home to the heartworm's offspring, which eventually grow into larvae. The next time they bite a dog or cat, the larvae are transmitted through the wound and find their way to the heart. Once there, they mature and reproduce, and in turn, enlarge the heart and block blood flow.

By the time a pet owner recognizes the symptoms of heartworm disease in their dog or cat, such as breathing problems, a persistent cough, and a lack of energy, extreme and expensive measures have to be taken to save the pet's life. Treatment can include a combination of antibiotics and injections that costs pet owners hundreds, if not, thousands of dollars.

“What surprises pet owners most about heartworm treatment is the time it takes to cure the disease,” said Dr. Kirk Hubbard, a veterinarian with Hawthorne Animal Hospital in Glen Carbon. “It can be anywhere from four months to a year before we're sure all adult heartworms have been killed, and for most of that time, pets are required to rest. That means no running or roughhousing—activities that dogs have a natural instinct to do.”

### **Prevention is the best medicine**

Preventing heartworm is simple, painless, and cost-effective. A variety of FDA-approved preventatives, including chewable oral tablets or topical liquid, range from just \$10 to \$30 a month, or you can bring your pet into your vet clinic for an injectable parasiticide every six months.

“When you compare the cost of prevention to the cost of treatment, there's no question heartworm preventatives are essential for both your pet's well-being and your financial health,” Dr. Hubbard explained. “We know if we skip an oil change for our car, we're

headed toward a very expensive problem down the road. We have to apply that same forethought to the pets we love—every month an owner doesn't have their dog or cat on a preventative is a month they put their pet's life at risk.”

During National Heartworm Awareness Month this April, the team at Hawthorne urges all pet owners to get your dog or cat on a preventative now. Your veterinarian will run a simple blood test to confirm your pet is heartworm-free, and if so, will prescribe a medication that best suits their needs. If they're already infected, they will require a series of injections first as older larvae can survive preventative treatment. To learn more about protecting your pet, contact Hawthorne Animal Hospital at 618-288-3971.

***About Hawthorne Animal Hospital*** - Founded in 1956, Hawthorne has evolved into a 24-hour animal hospital in Glen Carbon, Ill. serving St. Louis and the entire Metro East region. Today, Hawthorne is staffed by a team of renowned veterinarians with 124 years of combined experience in all areas of medical care and is equipped with cutting-edge technology to improve the health outcomes of the pets it treats. Hawthorne is accredited by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAAH), a designation only 12-17% of vet clinics in the U.S. currently hold. For more information, visit [www.hawthorneanimals.com](http://www.hawthorneanimals.com).