



HOW HEARTWORM DISEASE HURTS CATS

The more you know about this potentially fatal disease, the better prepared you'll be to protect your feline friend from infection. Read on for answers to your common questions.

1. Do cats really get heartworms?

Heartworms aren't just a dog problem. If you live in an area where heartworm infection is prevalent in dogs, your cat is at risk, too. Those pesky mosquitoes will bite any animal—regardless of whether its tail wags or flicks.

2. How do mosquitoes transmit heartworms to cats?

Mosquitoes are carriers of heartworm larvae, and just one bite can infect your cat. When a mosquito bites a cat, the larvae enter the cat's system through the bite wound. Some of these larvae develop into adult heartworms and eventually die, causing severe inflammation or damage to blood vessels in the lungs that can be fatal. The larvae that don't make it to maturity die in the cat's lungs, leading to heartworm-associated respiratory disease. Heartworms can even be found in the body cavities, arteries and central nervous system of cats. What's worse, there's no approved or recommended treatment for heartworm disease in cats.

3. Mosquitoes aren't common where I live. Does my cat still need prevention?

Yes. Cases of feline heartworm disease have been reported in all 50 states. The occurrence of heartworm disease is markedly lower in some states, but mosquitoes are resilient and can even survive through the winter. Since it's hard to tell when mosquitoes will be active, year-round prevention is a must.

4. I don't need to worry if my cat doesn't go outside, right?

Wrong. Indoor cats may be at lower risk for heartworm disease than outdoor cats, but there's no guarantee a mosquito won't get into your house—and it only takes one bite to do damage. Studies have reported that approximately 28 percent of cats diagnosed with heartworm disease were indoor-only cats, so year-round prevention is key for indoor cats as well as free-roamers.

5. How do I know whether my cat has heartworm disease?

Diagnosing heartworm disease in cats can be complicated, often requiring blood tests and radiographs or ultrasound. Additionally, since cats are naturally stoic creatures, it may be hard to tell that your cat is sick until the disease has become a major problem. If you notice your cat displaying any signs of respiratory distress, such as coughing, panting, open-mouthed breathing or wheezing, it's a good idea to take her to your veterinarian immediately.

6. What happens if my cat becomes infected with heartworm disease?

Unfortunately, there's no treatment for feline heartworm disease, but cats that test positive can often still be helped with good, supportive veterinary care. Your veterinarian can help determine the best possible plan based on the type and severity of your cat's clinical signs.

7. I want to start my cat on heartworm prevention. What are my options?

There are a number of options available for preventing heartworm disease in cats, and many of the medications perform double-duty and protect against intestinal parasites, too. From chewable tablets to topical spot-on products, there's sure to be a preventive that fits your cat's lifestyle—and yours. Talk to your veterinarian for recommendations.

Information provided by the American Heartworm Society and KNOW Heartworms.