

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEARTWORM TESTING



Q HOW DOES MY DOG GET TESTED?

The heartworm test is a simple blood test, with only a very **small amount of blood** needed to run the test. It is designed to detect very small levels of the heartworm antigen, which is a fancy word to describe proteins from the worms. A different test can also be run that detects microfilaria which are the babies of the worm.

These tests can only detect **mature adults** of the worm, which occur approximately 6-9 months **AFTER** your dog was bitten by an infected mosquito!

Q WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TEST MY DOG EVERY YEAR WHEN I FAITHFULLY GIVE MY DOG A HEARTWORM PREVENTIVE MEDICATION?

Even with the best intentions, missed doses can happen. **If a dose is given late, or completely forgotten** for one month, this increases the risk of infection being transmitted. We recommend a reminder system like www.mypetrereminder.ca that will notify you when it is time to give a dose.

Also, some dogs can be skilled at pretending they've swallowed their dose, and you might only find it a month later behind the couch! If your dog vomited after the dose, speak to your veterinarian about what steps to take next.

If we don't detect an adult heartworm infection early, devastating permanent damage to blood vessels around the heart can occur. Treatment is much more successful in the early stages of the disease. The treatment is not 100%, is expensive, and requires strict exercise restriction.

There's not much point in using a product that is designed to prevent a disease without confirming the status of your dog's health first. **An annual test provides peace of mind.**

Q MY VETERINARIAN HAS RECOMMENDED TO DELAY HEARTWORM TESTING. IS THIS SAFE?

There will be situations where the **timing of the test** may need to be adjusted by your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will decide when a test can be safely delayed. Regular testing remains important.

Q IN WHAT KIND OF SITUATION WOULD IT BE NECESSARY TO DO A HEARTWORM TEST IMMEDIATELY?

Some dogs are at higher risk and should ideally **not** have their test delayed: newly adopted dogs from rescue organizations where heartworm disease is endemic (areas of the USA), dogs that missed one or more doses of prevention from the previous year, dogs with a cough or other symptoms of illness.

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I ADOPTED A DOG FROM A HIGH RISK AREA LIKE THE USA, AND IT CAME HERE WITH A NEGATIVE HEARTWORM TEST. DO I NEED ANOTHER ONE?

Yes! Dogs entering Canada from areas where heartworm disease is endemic are not considered 'negative' until they have had a minimum of 2 tests following their last exposure to mosquitos.



MY PUPPY IS 5 MONTHS OLD. DOES HE NEED A HEARTWORM TEST?

Every dog over the age of 6 months needs a heartworm test. Generally, we don't test dogs younger than 6 months of age because the test only detects adult heartworms, and they take 6-9 months to mature. Talk to your veterinarian about the best timing for your puppy.



MY TEST HAS BEEN DELAYED. IS IT SAFE TO START HEARTWORM PREVENTION? WHAT IF MY DOG ALREADY HAS A HEARTWORM INFECTION?

There are heartworm preventive products available that have demonstrated safety in heartworm positive dogs. Preventive products however, are not meant to treat an existing adult heartworm infection. The good news is that prevention for any future infection can be started while you plan for your next test. It is important to get your dog tested as soon as is recommended by your veterinarian. Early detection and treatment are critical for your dog's health.



SHOULD I GET MY DOG TESTED FOR OTHER DISEASES, SUCH AS LYME DISEASE?

Your veterinarian will evaluate the need to test for other diseases such as Lyme disease and other tick-borne disease exposure at the same time as your heartworm test. Combined tests exist and can be done with the **same small blood sample**. Depending on your dog's age and other factors, your veterinarian may also recommend **wellness** testing to assess other aspects of your dog's health.



WHAT ABOUT CATS? SHOULD THEY BE TESTED TOO?

Indoor and outdoor cats can get heartworm disease too from an infected mosquito bite. Unlike dogs, there are no licensed treatment options available. Testing to detect infection is more complicated and not always accurate. Heartworm poses a significant health risk to cats, as even a low worm burden can have devastating consequences. **Prevention is key!** Talk to your veterinarian about safe, effective and easy-to-use options for heartworm prevention for your feline friend.