

Stepping Up Prevention Against Heartworm Disease

2005 guidelines for diagnosis, prevention and management of Heartworm infection.

August 15, 2005 During the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine Forum in Baltimore on June 1, the American Heartworm Society (AHS) announced the 2005 Guidelines for the Diagnosis, Prevention and Management of Heartworm Infection in Cats and Dogs. Heartworms are parasitic worms living in the arteries of the lungs and in the right side of the heart, causing a variety of health problems, which can lead to death. Mosquitoes help cyclically spread the disease to and from pets.

Each year, dogs and cats die needlessly from complications to this very preventable disease, says Charles Thomas Nelson, DVM and president of the AHS. These new guidelines are based upon the latest, ongoing research conducted around the world, he says. Several sources, such as pharmaceutical companies, private laboratories, veterinarians and parasitologists, conduct research and the AHS compiles it to create the guidelines.

The AHS wants veterinarians and pet owners to know the following:
Annual Testing is NecessaryIn the past, if a cat or dog had been on preventative methods routinely, it was not necessary to test every year. These pets were tested only every two or three years. But because of reports of some animals on preventatives that still contracted heartworms, the AHS recommends a more conservative testing routine. It may be too difficult to document when an animal has not been checked in three years. Annual testing will ensure that an infection is caught early to effectively manage it.
Switching Prevention Methods Requires Additional TestingPet owners sometimes switch between prevention medications. In these instances, retesting must occur during specific time periods in order to ensure the pet is protected. When switching from one product to another, it is necessary to test more often.
Year-Round Prevention is SupportedMost veterinarians recommend year-round heartworm prevention, even in seasonal areas. One reason for this is to make sure the pet owner properly gives the medication. Surveys show that probably only 75 percent of the prescribed doses are given.