

Heartworm Disease in Oregon

Heartworm is a serious disease found in both dogs and cats that can lead to heart and lung disease and possibly even death. The life cycle involves an infected mosquito biting your pet and transmitting an infected larvae into your animal. Approximately 6 -7 months later, the larvae molt into an adult worm within the heart.

Signs your dog may exhibit if he has become infected include: coughing, exercise intolerance, decreased appetite, and weight loss. Cats exhibit signs of vomiting, difficulty breathing, lethargy, and weight loss. If the disease is mild or in the initial stages, you may not witness any signs at all.

Although the disease is more common in warm and tropical climates, it has been reported in all 50 states. **In the Portland Metro area, more cases are being reported every year.** We do see more cases in the eastern and southern portions of the state. Your dog is at a higher risk if it partakes in outdoor activities, such as hiking and camping, but even if your pet is predominately indoors, it is still at risk.

The American Heartworm Society recommends annual testing and year round prevention for dogs and cats. It is recommended to do a blood test first prior to starting on a preventative. Prevention is safe, easy, and inexpensive, while treatment for dogs is often complicated and expensive. There is no effective treatment for heartworm disease in cats. Treatment of cats is aimed at helping them tolerate the disease versus eliminating it. Please talk to your veterinarian regarding the many different types of preventatives available, and which would be best for your pet.

At the Parkway Veterinary Hospital, we follow the recommendation of the American Heartworm Society in advising yearly testing and year-round prevention.