

Humane Society of Elmore County News – 1 Apr '19
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April is Heartworm prevention month and sadly dogs testing positive for heartworms is far too common in our shelter as we health screen pets for adoption. Heartworms are transferred through mosquito bites and result in actual worms living in the heart of an affected dog or cat. These worms & microfilaria cause damage to the heart and other organs so affected pets often die far too young from complications such as congestive heart failure, pulmonary inflammation, kidney issues, etc. All it takes is one bite from an infected mosquito for your unprotected pet to get heartworms.

The key is PREVENTING heartworms in the first place. Not only is this easy to do, it is exceedingly cheap when compared to the cost (and danger) of having to treat your dog for heartworms. Dogs newly infected with heartworms may not exhibit any symptoms which is why an annual blood test by your pet's veterinarian is necessary. Once your Veterinarian determines your dog does not have the adult heartworms, they can then prescribe a monthly prevention that you can give your pet at home. The drugs to prevent heartworms are completely different than the drug necessary to treat a dog with heartworms so it is very important to never give your pet heartworm medicine until they have been tested by your veterinarian.

The good news is heartworm prevention is safe, easy and inexpensive. There are a variety of options for preventing heartworm infection in both dogs and cats, including monthly tablets and chewables, monthly topicals and a six-month injectable product (available only for dogs), all available from your veterinarian. These products are NOT available for you to purchase at a pet supply store, your local feed store or on-line without a prescription – you must get these from a licensed Veterinarian! Please do NOT purchase heartworm prevention from on-line sites that do not require a prescription from your Veterinarian as you may be purchasing potentially low-quality products or, worse, fake products. These preventatives are extremely effective, and when administered properly will prevent heartworm infection by interrupting the life cycle so they cannot become adult heartworms. An added benefit from keeping your pet on heartworm preventative is that many of them also prevent other parasites like roundworms, whipworms and hookworms (a few also prevent tapeworms), AND some products also prevent fleas and ticks.

Honestly most of us only think about dogs when we think heartworm prevention but more and more studies are finding that our cats are also at great risk and there are preventives (oral & topical) for cats too. So please talk to your Veterinarian about heartworm prevention for your dogs AND cats (and, FYI, Ferrets too).

In the long run keeping your dog (and cat) on monthly heartworm prevention will not only keep your pet healthy it will save you a LOT of money and heartache for a very expensive, lengthy and risky adult heartworm treatment. Since we certainly have our share of mosquitos here in Alabama, Heartworm disease is prevalent so please, please, please keep your pets on monthly heartworm prevention.