

HEARTWORM DISEASE IN CATS

HOW DO CATS GET HEARTWORMS?

Heartworms are spread to cats by infected mosquitoes. Any cat that lives where there are mosquitoes can get heartworms. Since mosquitoes often come indoors, this includes indoor cats and cats that are only occasionally outside.

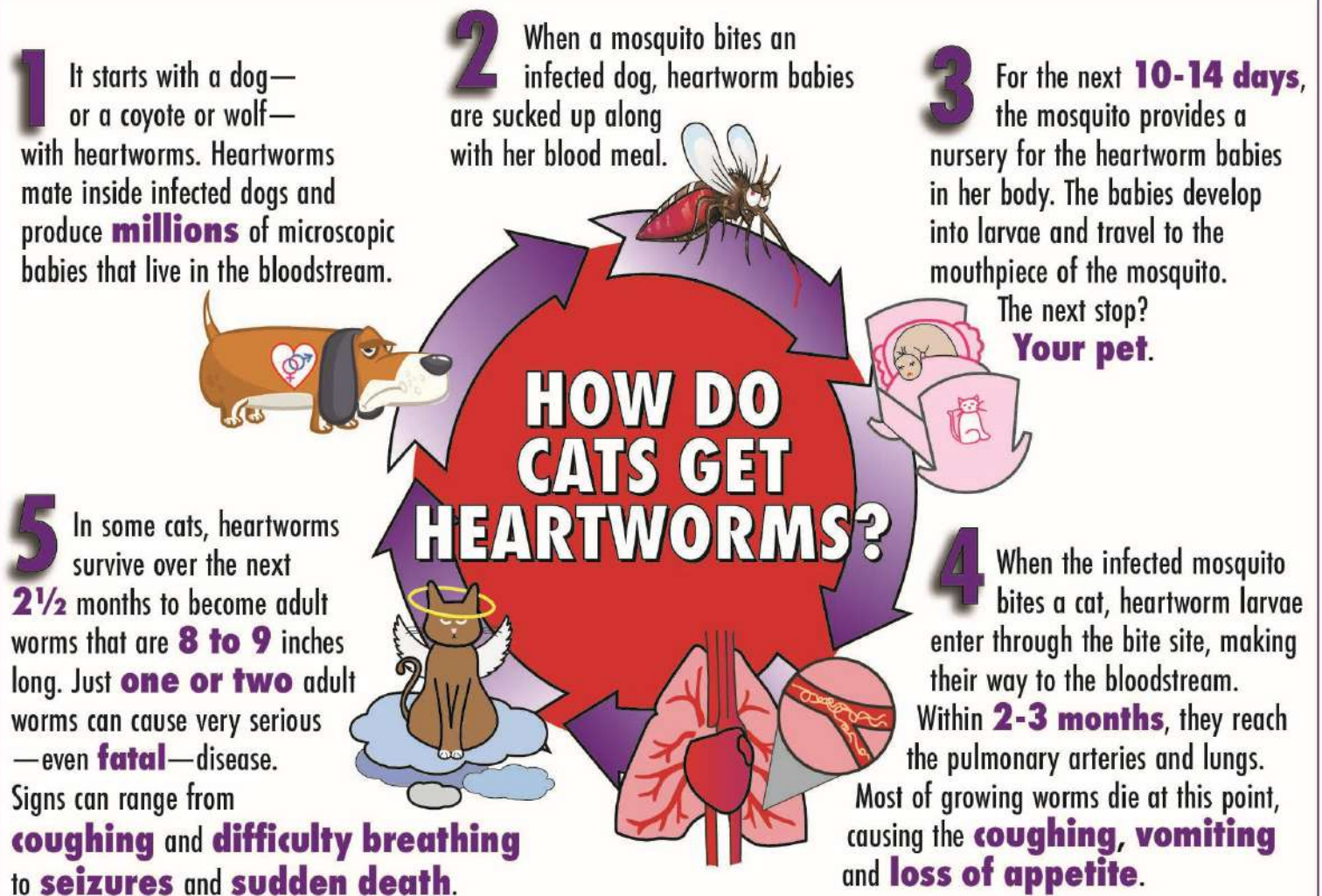
Heartworm disease is more common in cats than many people realize. Dogs are at risk from heartworms in all 50 states—and so are cats.

See “HOW DO CATS GET HEARTWORMS?” to learn how heartworms can develop inside your cat.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CAT GETS HEARTWORMS?

When a cat gets infected with heartworms, their immune system goes on alert to kill the worms inside the body. This can happen early in the infection, when the worms are immature and just a couple of inches in length, OR when the heartworms are 8 to 12 inches long and fully-grown adults.

Dying immature worms in the blood vessels of the lungs can lead to a condition called heartworm-associated respiratory disease (HARD). Common signs include



poor appetite, coughing, wheezing, vomiting and difficulty breathing. These are often confused with asthma, hairballs, and pneumonia.

If even one or two heartworms survive to adulthood, a cat can develop serious disease and die. Signs include severe breathing distress, as well as blindness or seizures.



Cats with heartworms can develop serious disease and even die.

HOW CAN I KNOW IF MY CAT HAS HEARTWORMS?

Cats are harder to diagnose with heartworms than dogs. However, diagnosis is very important, because a single worm can be fatal to a cat.

If your veterinarian suspects your cat has heartworms, he or she might recommend blood tests or a combination of blood tests and imaging tests like x-rays, ultrasound or an echocardiogram.

Signs of heartworms in cats can range from coughing and wheezing to blindness or seizures.

MUST-KNOW FACTS ABOUT HEARTWORM TESTING:

- ♥ A veterinarian may recommend multiple blood tests, as well as imaging tests, to screen for heartworm infection.
- ♥ Some veterinarians recommend regular, annual heartworm screening for healthy cats while others only test cats when they suspect a heartworm infection. Both approaches can be appropriate.
- ♥ A veterinarian's decision to test may be influenced by how common heartworm infection is in both dogs and cats in the community.
- ♥ If your cat is on year-round heartworm prevention, routine annual screening is usually not recommended.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY CAT FROM HEARTWORMS?

Heartworm prevention in cats is easy, effective, affordable, and safe. You and your veterinarian can choose from flavored chewable tablets or topical medications. Some products should be given monthly, while others are administered every two months.

Heartworm preventives for cats have the added benefit of also protecting cats from other common parasites. Some products are effective against intestinal worms while others also work on external pests like fleas, ticks, and mites.

MUST-KNOW FACTS ABOUT HEARTWORM PREVENTION

- ♥ If you have a new kitten, **start your kitty on heartworm prevention by the time he or she is 8 weeks old.** Medication dosages vary by weight, so you and your veterinarian will need to adjust the dosage as your cat grows.
- ♥ **Give your cat his or her heartworm preventive on the same day of the month.** Mark your calendar or set a reminder in your phone—it's the best way to create a healthy habit. If you forget or give the medication late, your cat could be at risk of infection. Be sure to tell your veterinarian if this happens.
- ♥ It's almost impossible to predict when you will see the first—or last—mosquito of the season. Keep it simple and **maintain your cat on prevention year-round.**
- ♥ Living an indoor life is no guarantee against heartworm infection in cats. After all, mosquitoes can come indoors! In fact, in a North Carolina study, researchers learned that **one in four** cats diagnosed with heartworms was an *indoor-only* cat.

No matter which product you choose, the best way to protect your cat against heartworms is to give a preventive year-round. Being indoors is no guarantee against infection, but you can reduce your cat's

exposure to mosquitoes by making sure he or she stays indoors during peak mosquito times. You can also remove sources of standing water around your home where mosquitoes might breed.

The best way to protect your pet against heartworms is to give the preventive year-round.



Because mosquitoes that carry heartworms can come inside, indoor cats are at risk for heartworms, too.

WHAT IF MY CAT GETS HEARTWORMS?

Unfortunately, the injectable medications used to treat heartworms in dogs aren't safe to use in cats. Veterinarians can only manage the signs of disease, like breathing problems or nausea, when they appear. If your cat is diagnosed with heartworms, you should expect to bring him or her to your veterinarian more frequently for monitoring and medication. This makes heartworm prevention extra important in cats.

Most importantly of all, infected cats should be kept on heartworm prevention to stop further infection from taking place. Prevention is by far the BEST approach for all pets.



Keeping cats on year-round heartworm prevention is one of the best ways to show you love them.

Heartworm preventives for cats have the added benefit of also protecting cats from other common parasites.

For more in-depth information about heartworm disease in cats, as well as its prevention, diagnosis, and treatment, visit the American Heartworm Society website at heartwormsociety.org.



**AMERICAN
HEARTWORM
SOCIETY™**
EST. 1974

American Heartworm Society
PO Box 1352
Holly Springs, NC 27540, USA
www.heartwormsociety.org

© 2023 American Heartworm Society

Printing underwritten
by an educational grant from

zoetis™



HEARTWORM DISEASE IN CATS

MUST-KNOW FACTS ABOUT HEARTWORM DISEASE

- ♥ Heartworm disease can be **deadly** in cats.
- ♥ **Mosquitoes** spread heartworms to cats as well as dogs.
- ♥ Heartworm disease in cats is more common than many owners realize.
- ♥ **Indoor cats** as well as outdoor cats get heartworms.
- ♥ A cat can develop **serious—even fatal—disease** from a single worm.
- ♥ Heartworm disease is **harder to diagnose** in cats than dogs.
- ♥ There is **no approved treatment** to kill heartworms in cats.
- ♥ **Using heartworm prevention—and using it year-round—is the only way to protect your cat from heartworms.**



**AMERICAN
HEARTWORM
SOCIETY™**
EST. 1974