



# The Truth About Cats and Dogs

Heartworm disease is a very serious disease in both cats and dogs, but the unique physiology of each species means that it is really two very *different* diseases. As you learn about the similarities and differences here, however, remember the bottom line: both dogs and cats need **heartworm testing** *and* year-round **heartworm prevention**.

HEARTWORM IN DOGS		HEARTWORM IN CATS
Heartworm disease is a year-round health threat that has been diagnosed in all 50 states.	<b>Prevalence and risk</b>	Heartworm disease is a year-round health threat that has been diagnosed in all 50 states.
Dogs become infected through the bite of mosquitoes, which acquire heartworm larvae from infected dogs, coyotes, foxes and wolves.	<b>Transmission</b>	Cats become infected through the bite of mosquitoes, which acquire heartworm larvae from infected dogs, coyotes, foxes and wolves.
Heartworms in dogs grow to an average of 12 inches in length. Worms live 5-7 years.	<b>Heartworm characteristics</b>	Heartworms in cats are shorter than those in dogs, averaging 8-9 inches in length. Worms live 2-4 years.
Dogs are a natural heartworm host; heartworms that live inside a dog mature, mate and produce offspring.	<b>Host animal</b>	Cats are a susceptible heartworm host, but are more resistant than the dog. Most worms do not survive to be mature adults, but still cause damage.
Nearly 100% of dogs exposed to infective heartworm larvae become infected.	<b>Susceptibility</b>	Approximately 75% of cats exposed to infective heartworm larvae become infected.
The average number of heartworms in an infected dog is 14-20. It is not uncommon for a dog to have more than 50 worms.	<b>Worm numbers</b>	Most cats with infections have less than 6 heartworms; 1- to 2-worm infections are common.
Worms living in the heart, lungs and arteries cause an inflammatory response that results in blockages in blood vessels. The damage from heartworms can be permanent, affecting a dog's health and quality of life. Heartworm disease tends to progress as worm numbers grow and cause damage to arteries and organs.	<b>Disease characteristics</b>	Cats are highly sensitive to heartworms and, unlike dogs, do not need to harbor adult worms to become ill. Heartworm larvae can trigger a severe immune reaction called heartworm associated respiratory disease (HARD); this syndrome occurs in an estimated 50% of heartworm infections in cats.
Symptoms in dogs usually start with a cough, which worsens as the disease progresses. Fatigue, difficulty breathing and weight loss are common in later stages. Ultimately, affected dogs can experience heart failure and death.	<b>Disease symptoms</b>	Cats develop an asthma-like lung disease with respiratory distress and chronic coughing or vomiting. In cats with adult worms, the death of just one worm can cause sudden death.
Heartworm is easily diagnosed in most dogs with a simple blood test. Testing is recommended before the dog is started on preventive, then annually thereafter.	<b>Diagnostic testing</b>	Heartworm in cats is difficult to diagnose with blood tests. Further testing, including x-rays, may be required to make a diagnosis. Blood tests are recommended before a cat is started on a preventive.
An FDA-approved medication is available to eliminate heartworms in dogs.	<b>Treatment</b>	There is no approved treatment for heartworms in cats.
An estimated 37% of dogs in the U.S. are on heartworm prevention. <b>The American Heartworm Society recommends year-round heartworm prevention. Prevention is easy and highly effective!</b>	<b>Prevention</b>	Less than 5% of cats in the U.S. are on heartworm prevention. <b>The American Heartworm Society recommends year-round heartworm prevention. Prevention is easy and highly effective!</b>