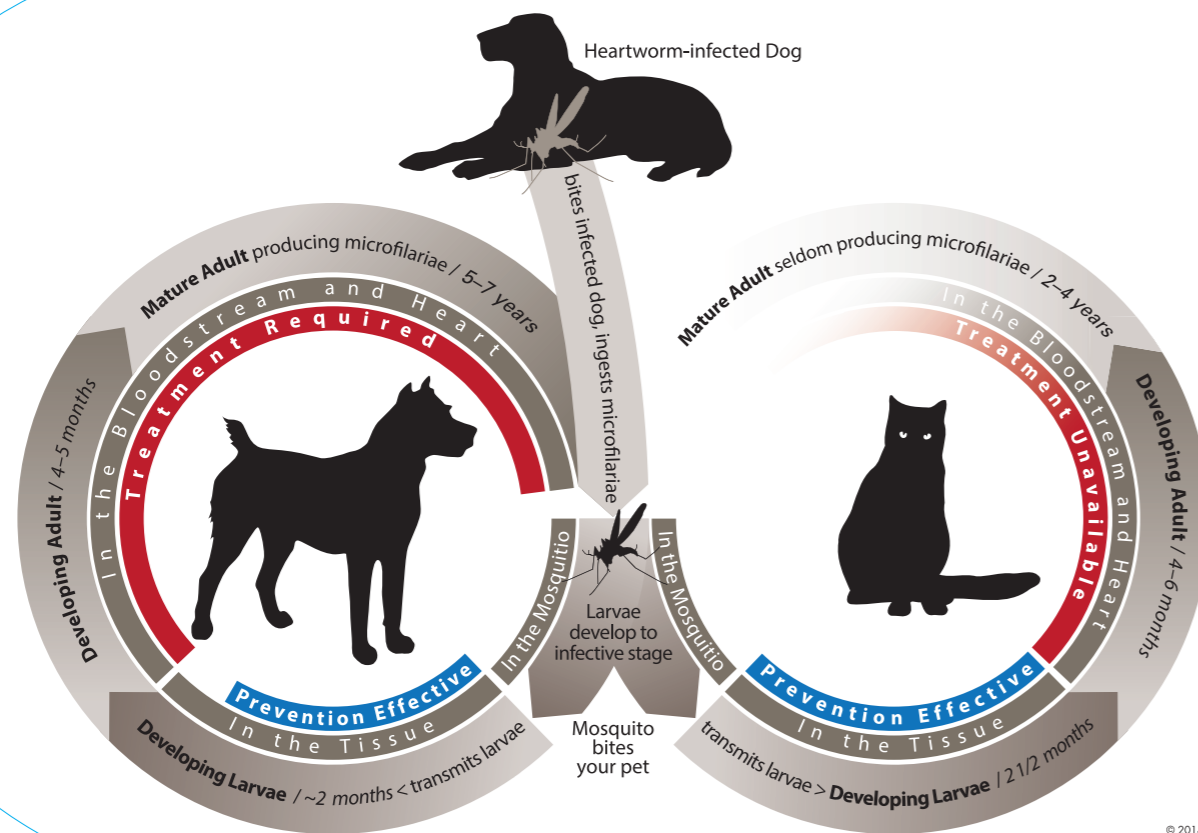




Life Cycle of the Heartworm



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American Heartworm Society
Wilmington, Delaware

The Truth About Heartworm Disease and Your Pet

Prevention vs Treatment



Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease in pets.

It is caused by worms that grow up to a foot long and live in your pet's heart and lungs, as well as blood vessels in the lungs. The disease is spread when mosquitoes bite infected dogs (as well as coyotes and foxes), then—once infected—bite other dogs and cats. An indoor lifestyle does not protect a pet from heartworm infection, because mosquitoes carrying heartworm infection can easily come indoors.

Heartworm prevention is essential.

Although dogs can be treated for heartworm infection, heartworms can permanently damage their blood vessels and lungs. Meanwhile, there is **no** approved treatment for cats, and heartworm can lead to chronic respiratory disease and even sudden death.

Prevention Is Easy.

- Heartworm prevention is safe, simple and effective. Preventive medication is available in pills or topical drops that are given monthly, or as an injection given by your veterinarian every 6 months.
- Puppies and kittens should be put on heartworm protection by the time they are 8 weeks old.
- Year-round protection with some heartworm preventives also protects your pet from other parasites, such as fleas, ticks, mites and intestinal parasites. A veterinarian can determine what is best for an individual pet.
- Heartworm prevention costs around \$5 to \$15 a month, depending on the pet's size.



Treatment Is Hard.

- Heartworm treatment can be life-saving for a dog, but is complex and time-consuming. Owners need to follow their veterinarian's instructions carefully to help avoid treatment complications. Unfortunately, there is **no approved treatment** for heartworm disease in cats.
- When dogs are diagnosed with heartworm infection, they can be given medications to kill the adult heartworms and help minimize complications. When cats are diagnosed with heartworm infection, veterinarians can prescribe medications to help stabilize their condition but can't cure them.
- The treatment period for dogs lasts for 3-4 months. Throughout treatment, it is essential to keep dogs quiet to avoid serious—and even fatal—complications. That means cage rest, with just short, on-leash trips outside for dogs to relieve themselves. Some dogs will also need to spend time in the hospital.
- Heartworm treatment in dogs can cost \$1,000 or more in medications and veterinary services. Again, there is no approved treatment for cats, so prevention is essential.

