

# Top 5 Heartworm Myths

You may know that mosquitoes transmit heartworms, but what do you really know about heartworm preventative and the impact it has on your pet.

## 1. IT'S SEASONAL

There is some small truth to this myth because heartworm transmission is dependent on climatic factors. It is widely accepted that a temperature of 57 F or higher is needed for heartworm larvae to develop to the infective stage within mosquitoes. However there are two complicating factors to this theory: cyclic temperature variations due to weather patterns and changes from one environment to the next within local areas. As a result of this climatic uncertainty, **the American Heartworm Society (AHS) and the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) recommend year-round heartworm prevention in all areas of the country.** With year-round administration, you don't have to remember when to start and stop giving your pet his medication. Plus, you gain the added benefit of controlling intestinal parasites year round.

## 2. IT'S REGIONAL

This is another myth that has some basis of truth. The severity of infections is somewhat regional; for example, an animal living in Louisiana is likely to harbor more worms than an animal living in Montana. Therefore, the recommendation for treating a heartworm-positive pet will vary based on the severity of the infection. However, the prevention recommendations remain the same across the country. **The AHS and CAPC recommend year-round administration of heartworm preventative for all 50 states.**

## 3. IT'S HARD TO PROTECT AGAINST

This is not truth. With a variety of heartworm preventatives on the market, we can prevent heartworm disease easier than ever before. It is the human factor that plays into affect when giving heartworm preventative. We have heard from numerous people that they just can't remember to do it. In each box of preventative, the manufacturer gives you stickers to place on your calendar. Some people put the preventative with their car, rent, or mortgage coupon book and administer the medication on the day they pay that bill. We have also heard the excuse that heartworm preventives are too expensive. You need to keep in mind that you can **buy a lifetime of heartworm preventives for less than the cost to treat your pet for heartworms.**

## 4. IT'S EASY TO TREAT

**There is no easy way to treat this infection.** All treatments are designed to kill the worms, which range from 6 to 14 inches in length and are located in the large artery of the heart. These worms will decompose, break up, and lodge in the capillaries of the lungs, where they obstruct blood flow. Here, specialized cells in the bloodstream help clear the dead worms particles. If the dog is allowed to exercise during the treatment period, the increased blood flow through the lungs can cause capillaries to rupture. Treatments must be customized to the needs of each pet. Age, clinical signs, activity level, and major organ function must be considered when formulating a treatment plan. Although treatment can be difficult on a pet, a heartworm infection left untreated is even deadlier.

## 5. IT ONLY AFFECTS DOGS

More than 30 species of animals are susceptible to heartworms; coyotes, foxes, wolves, domestic dogs, wild dogs, sea lions, ferrets, domestic cats, wild cats, and even people. Even though heartworm disease in dogs is a cardiovascular disease that can lead to heart failure, heartworms primarily cause respiratory disease in cats. In addition, most heartworms in cats never make it to the adult stages. As a result of these two factors, **feline heartworm infection is very hard to diagnose.** What we've determined from all this is that **cats need to be on a heartworm preventive, even if they are indoor cats. Mosquitoes do come inside.**