

Heartworm Disease

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Be sure to visit our website townsvillevetclinic.com.au for more information on caring for your pets, large and small, and the services provided by the Townsville Veterinary Clinic

And don't forget that you can visit the website to book small animal **appointments online** too !



Instagram



What causes Heartworm Disease?

Heartworm disease in the dog is caused by a parasite which, in the adult form, is about 12-30cm long. The number of worms inside the heart and pulmonary (lung) blood vessels can vary from 3 – 160+. The incidence of heartworm disease in North Queensland is 90% or more, that means any dog not on heartworm protection will stand a 90% chance of getting heartworm disease.

The life cycle of Heartworms

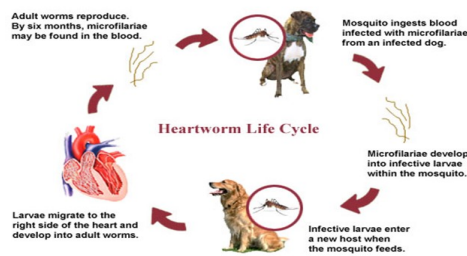
The adult female heartworm produces microfilaria (larval stage) which circulate in the general blood supply. The mosquito, when feeding on the infected dog, sucks up the microfilaria which spend about 21 days developing into the next stage.

When the infected mosquito feeds on another dog which is not on heartworm protection, the larval stage heartworm escapes down the sucking tube of the mosquito into the dog, where it then travels into the subcutaneous tissues.

At approximately 3 months, immature adults start to migrate from the subcutaneous tissues to the right side of the heart.

Clinical signs of Heartworm Disease

- Loss of exercise tolerance
- Cough in the more advanced stage
- Right sided heart failure
- Swollen abdomen due to fluid accumulation, rapid/difficult breathing and in advanced stages



Diagnosis

The diagnosis of Heartworm Disease is based upon:

Blood tests

- (1) Detection of larval stage heartworms
- (2) Detection of heartworm antigen

The second test (antigen) is very useful because a dog can be infected with heartworm and not demonstrate larval stage heartworm. This situation is called Occult Heartworm Disease and can be responsible for up to 50% of infected dogs. Further diagnostic information as to the amount of damage caused can be obtained from:

- X-rays
- Ultrasound
- Biochemical tests (liver and kidney function tests)

Occasionally larval stage heartworm can be found in unusual places. In one situation, the larval stage was removed from the anterior chamber of the eye.

Damage caused by Heartworm

The adult worms are found principally in the right ventricle of the heart and the main pulmonary (lung) arteries. Lung damage may lead to chronic coughing and in severe cases, fatal bleeding from the lungs.

The mechanical interference of the worms can lead to heart failure. Larval stages can block the kidney blood supply leading to severe kidney damage. It is important to realize that at any stage of heartworm disease; sudden death due to blockage of arteries in lungs, central nervous system, heart, bowel or kidney can occur. It is vital that dogs over 6 months of age be tested for heartworm before being given the daily heartworm tablets. Dogs which are already infected and are accidentally given these tablets may suffer acute shock and die.

Treatment of Heartworm

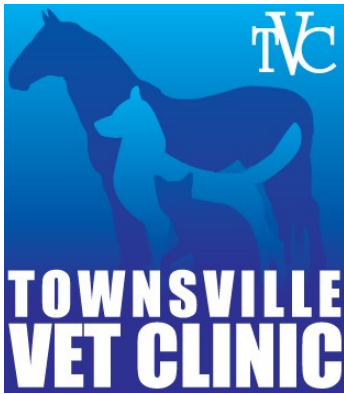
Once a diagnosis has been made, blood tests are performed to check liver and kidney functions. If these functions are satisfactory, the patient is started on antibiotics, steroids and a preventative to kill any larval stages. After this initial therapy a series of injections are given to kill any adult worms located in the heart. The adult worms die and break up into small pieces and are gradually absorbed by the body.

Prevention of Heartworm

Currently, two forms exist:

1. Monthly prevention in the oral or spot on form. Some of these drugs incorporate a monthly flea protection also.
2. Once a year preventative injection.

In North Queensland we do not have a mosquito season, and your dog is at risk every day of the year. It is vital if you own a dog that you ensure heartworm protection is given all year round for the life of the dog. Should you be transferred to a southern state, it is best to consult the local vets in that area regarding continued use of heartworm protection.



Updates and Specials

Online Bookings

Did you know that we offer online bookings for our small animal clients ?

Keep forgetting to make that vaccination appointment during business hours and only remember when you get home late ? Need to make a recheck appointment but also need to find the time to call ?

Head over to our website : <https://townsvillevetclinic.com.au/> and hit “Click here to make an appointment”. Whether you are a new client or an existing client, enter your details or find your file and simply find a time and date that suits you. As an existing client, you can also view your pets' current reminders and request vaccination certificates.

Of course, the online booking system will never replace the need to give us a call on 4779 0233 if your pet is unwell or if there is an emergency.

Online Shop

Would you like the convenience of online shopping while still supporting a local business ?

Did you know that we have an online shop attached to our website ?

A recent revamp of the site has added a Click and Collect function to the purchase of some pet foods, so if you would like to know more or browse the range of products available, please click on the link below:

<https://shop.townsvillevetclinic.com.au/>



Heartworm Amnesty

Is your dog on a heartworm preventative ? Ever missed a dose ?

You've probably heard the saying: “prevention is better than cure”. When it comes to heartworm this couldn't be more true. In fact, it's because heartworm can be difficult (and expensive) to treat that vets recommend continuous 12-month protection for all dogs.

We are seeing a worrying increase in positive heartworm cases. If you're concerned about heartworm, book an appointment today to discuss your **FREE** heartworm test under the Heartworm Amnesty Program which is running during September and October 2023 (*conditions apply).

