

Heartworm disease

Heartworm disease is caused by a parasitic infection that affects the heart and lungs.

Heartworms (*Dirofilaria immitis*) are a parasitic worm transmitted by infected mosquito bites. Microscopic larvae enter the skin and migrate to your pet's heart and lungs, where they can grow to up to 12 inches long. Without proper prevention and treatment, heartworm disease can be deadly.

- ▶ Prevention is the best, safest, and least expensive medicine for heartworm.

What does it look like?

Common signs:

- Coughing and lethargy
- Exercise intolerance
- Weight loss
- Fainting
- Respiratory distress
- Sudden death

- ▶ There may be no signs of infection until heartworm has caused severe tissue damage.



How is it diagnosed?

- Clinical signs, including lethargy and weight loss
- Blood work and other laboratory tests
- X-rays

How is it treated?

After your veterinary team runs a blood test to rule out an existing infection, they will prescribe either oral or an injectable medication to kill adult worms and larvae. However, pets with advanced heartworm disease will require extended treatment with medications and strictly restricted activity.

- ▶ If your pet is diagnosed with heartworms, discuss treatment and prognosis with your veterinary team immediately.



How to help your pet

- Use year-round heartworm prevention as prescribed by your veterinary team
 - Have your pet tested for heartworms every year
 - If your pet has heartworm, strictly follow your pet's medication schedule and all exercise restrictions to avoid serious complications
 - Contact your veterinary team with any questions
- ▶ Heartworm prevention is a customizable option for your Banfield Optimum Wellness Plan™.

