

What every Feline Family should know:

Feline heartworm disease is on the rise



When you think of heartworm disease, you might assume it's only a problem that affects dogs – or perhaps outdoor cats. In reality, heartworm disease in cats (indoor and outdoor alike) **is on the rise**. And, unlike heartworm disease that affects dogs, there is **no cure** for feline heartworm disease. **The drug used to treat the disease in dogs is highly toxic to cats.**

Heartworm is spread by mosquitoes

Feline heartworm, caused by the parasite *Dirofilaria immitis*, is transmitted by mosquitoes. Heartworms that enter your cat's bloodstream plug up the right ventricle and pulmonary arteries of the cat's heart, impeding blood flow to the rest of the body, causing lack of oxygen to tissue. This build up can cause sudden death in a cat. It only takes one heartworm to cause death in a cat.

Prevention is KEY!

The only way to avoid feline heartworm is with a monthly preventive treatment that comes in chewable form (Heartgard®) or topical liquid (Revolution®). If given correctly each month, these preventatives are 100% effective. Both medications are available year-round from your veterinarian. Your cat will need to be examined by a veterinarian within one year of dispensing the preventative since it's a prescription medication.

Signs can be invisible to severe

Symptoms of feline heartworm, which can range from hidden to severe, are sometimes misdiagnosed as feline asthma or inflammatory bowel disease. If you notice coughing, wheezing, difficult or rapidly breathing, vomiting, fainting, salivation, lethargy, weight loss, anorexia (not eating), acute blindness or seizures, see your veterinarian immediately. In some cats, heartworm can cause sudden death.

Heartworm is detected with a blood test

Diagnosing feline heartworm requires a simple blood test to determine how your cat's immune system is functioning and to look for the proteins that are present when heartworm is in the blood.

Dangerous times are April - November

In Michigan, mosquitoes start appearing in April and disappear in November (or the first frost). Many families keep their cats protected year-round, which means that you will always be in the habit of giving the preventative every month, *and* your cat will have the highest measure of protection possible. Families living in low-lying or densely wooded areas (where there are usually higher concentrations of mosquitoes) should be especially vigilant with the preventative each month.

Copyright © The Cat Practice 2013



875 S. Worth, Birmingham, MI 48009 • 248-540-3390 • thecatpracticepc.com

NOTE: Our "Feline Family" series covers many important topics to help your feline family members live longer, better and healthier lives. For other topics, or more information, go to www.thecatpracticepc.com or call us at 248-540-3390.