



## Heartworm Disease



Heartworm Disease is on the rise in Arizona. Heartworms are parasites that live in the heart of animals, and are transmitted through mosquito bites. Adult worms will produce larvae that circulate in the blood and when the mosquito takes a blood meal from an infected animal they ingest the heartworm larvae. When the mosquito next feeds on another animal they infect the next animal with the larvae thus transmitting the disease. It takes approximately 6 months for the larvae to become adult worms and infest the heart.

### **Symptoms:**

Symptoms for heartworm can vary from case to case. In some heartworm cases the animal does not show any symptoms at all. When there are clinical signs present they might be: Signs of heart or lung problems, coughing, listlessness, weight loss, decreased endurance, and a distended belly. If heartworm disease is not caught early enough it can lead to congestive heart failure or sudden death.

### **Diagnosis:**

Heartworm is diagnosed by a blood test that looks for heartworm antigens in the blood. Further testing may be recommended if heartworm disease is suspected but the heartworm test is negative.

### **Protection Against Heartworm Disease:**

It is recommended that all patients be tested for heartworm disease. There are now animals being diagnosed with heartworm disease in the northwest valley. While pets that are mostly outdoors are more at risk any pet can get heartworm disease. There are products available to prevent heartworm disease. In cases where a pet is over six months of age a heartworm test is required prior to preventative medications being given out. This is because it is extremely dangerous to give heartworm prevention to an animal that has heartworm already. In Arizona prevention should be given year round due to the fact that the weather is so mild mosquitoes are found here year round.

