

Chippewa Veterinary Clinic
Spring Newsletter 2009

Heartworm Season

Now is the season for your pets annual heartworm check. If you have a new dog or puppy in your family they should be tested for heartworm disease.

Heartworms are parasites that are spread by mosquitoes – an infected mosquito (it only takes one) bites the dog and deposits the early stage of the worm called microfilaria into the blood stream. These tiny microfilariae then develop into large worms (– up to a foot long!) and make their home in the blood vessels and heart chambers of the infected dog. Over time the worms damage the blood vessels and the heart and cause severe lung and heart failure.

Prevention of heartworm disease is safe, effective, and easily accomplished. A monthly chewable medication during the mosquito season eliminates the early developing stages of the heartworms.

Any animal that is exposed to mosquitoes need to be tested *before* they are started on heartworm preventative during the mosquito season, even animals that only go outside for bathroom breaks. Treating an infected dog is dangerous and can induce severe shock symptoms and fatal embolism. Testing for heartworms checks a small sample of your pet's blood to ensure there are no adult heartworms present. *The Chippewa Veterinary Clinic requires testing all dogs before they are started on a heartworm preventative.* If your pet is negative a preventative pill can be safely prescribed. The lifecycle of the heartworm takes up to 6 months to mature so young puppies may be started on preventative without a heartworm test. Dogs that are on a strict year round regimen can be tested every other year.

Tick Borne Diseases

There are two tick borne diseases that are prevalent in our region. *Lyme* and *Anaplasmosis* are transferred by ticks that are common in Wisconsin. These diseases cause similar symptoms in dogs which include sore joints, lameness that can shift between legs, fever, and loss of appetite. If left untreated the diseases can cause severe damage to the kidneys and liver.

There is a very good vaccination for *Lyme* disease available. Unfortunately there is no vaccination for *Anaplasmosis*. The best prevention for *Anaplasmosis* is limiting your dog's exposure to ticks and using effective topical medications such as Frontline or Advantix.

As with any disease early diagnosis is important to treatment outcomes. We recommend screening at risk pets for exposure to *Lyme* and *Anaplasmosis* disease annually. These simple blood tests can be run at the same time as your pet's annual Heartworm test. Early intervention with antibiotics and monitoring pets that are positive for any symptoms will greatly reduce long term risks from the disease.