



2703 Hempstead Turnpike
Levittown, NY 11756
(516) 796-2266
www.levittownvet.com

Feline Heartworm Disease

Historically, heartworm disease has been mainly a concern for our canine patients, but times are changing and so is the causative agent, *Dirofilaria immitis*. In fact, we appear to be diagnosing more heartworm disease in cats than dogs. There are two things that factor into this:

1. There are many more dogs, compared to cats, who are on monthly heartworm preventatives.
2. As time goes on, the heartworm organism adapts and figures out different ways to survive and infect new hosts.

Adult heartworms live in the heart and the major arteries of the lungs. An adult heartworm usually has a life span of about one year in a cat. Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes. A mosquito bites a dog that is infected, picks up the organism (*microfilaria*), bites a cat, and introduces the organism into the cat. At that point, the *microfilaria* may or may not turn into an adult worm. Even if it does not turn into an adult, the inflammatory changes that are produced in the lungs are the same as if an adult worm is present. Being an indoor-only cat does not eliminate the risk of heartworm infection. In fact, 5% of heartworm positive cats are exclusively indoors!

Heartworm disease is a very serious condition in cats. The most common clinical signs of heartworm disease in cats are difficulty breathing, coughing, vomiting, and sudden death. Coughing may be intermittent or occur in severe, sudden attacks that take place days apart. It mimics the symptoms of asthma, even when an adult worm is not present in the heart. Just exposure to the organism, without the development of an adult worm, causes the same inflammatory reaction in the lung as if there was an adult worm present in the heart. Heartworm disease also suppresses a cat's immune system and makes them susceptible to other illnesses.

There is currently no successful treatment that is reasonable for adult heartworm disease in cats.

Since treatment is not an option, prevention is that much more important. We recommend using Ivermectin by mouth (off-label) or Advantage Multi (topically) - each on a consistent, once-monthly basis.

Feel free to ask our knowledgeable doctors and staff about how you can easily prevent heartworm disease in your beloved feline friends!

