

# SOUTH EAST COUNTRY VETS

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## HEARTWORM DISEASE AND YOUR PET

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal condition that affects both dogs and cats. It is caused by parasitic heartworms that, as the name suggests, live in the major vessels of the lungs and heart. Over time, the presence of worms in heart and arteries causes inflammation and thickening of blood vessel walls. This increases pressure on the heart and as a result, heart failure develops which can eventually lead to death.

### HOW DOES A DOG BECOME INFECTED?

The microscopic larvae of the heartworm are transmitted by mosquitos. This means that *all* dogs are susceptible to the disease even if they have no other contact with dogs or whether they are indoor or outdoor pets. It takes just one mosquito bite to cause a heartworm infection!

### CLINICAL SIGNS OF HEARTWORM DISEASE

Heartworm disease can cause a variety of medical problems affecting the lungs, heart, liver and kidneys which can ultimately lead to death. Depending on number of worms and the duration of heartworm infection, dogs may show a variety of the following signs including:

- persistent cough
- breathing difficulties
- reduced appetite and weight loss
- lethargy and reduced exercise tolerance



### HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

A simple 10min blood test done in the clinic can tell us if your dog has heartworm or not. If negative, then heartworm prevention medication can be started immediately. If positive, a series of tests and chest radiographs help us to assess the stage and severity of the disease.

### IS THERE ANY TREATMENT FOR HEARTWORM DISEASE?

Treating your pet for heartworm disease is time consuming, costly and potentially dangerous so prevention is much better than cure. Should your pet test positive, a clear treatment plan would be outlined for you to follow.

### HOW DO I PROTECT MY PET?

Heartworm disease is 100% preventable and as a responsible pet owner, it should be an integral part of caring for your pet. Being in South-East Queensland, we live in an area of high risk for heartworm infection and disease so prevention is an absolute must.

Some options for protecting your adult dog against heartworm are as follows.

- Yearly Injection – Proheart injection given annually
- Monthly Tablets – Milbemax (heartworm, intestinal worms)  
Simparica trio (heartworm, intestinal worms, fleas & ticks)



Your pet should begin heartworm prevention by at least three months of age. After this age, your veterinarian may need to perform a blood test to determine if your pet is heartworm free before prevention can begin. Note that the above protocols are for adult dogs only and the time periods between treatment may vary if your dog is only a puppy.

*This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for a veterinary consultation.*

*It is recommended that a consultation be arranged with a veterinary practitioner if you have any concerns with your pet's health.*