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Animal Hospital & Wellness Center

The Best Care For Your Companion

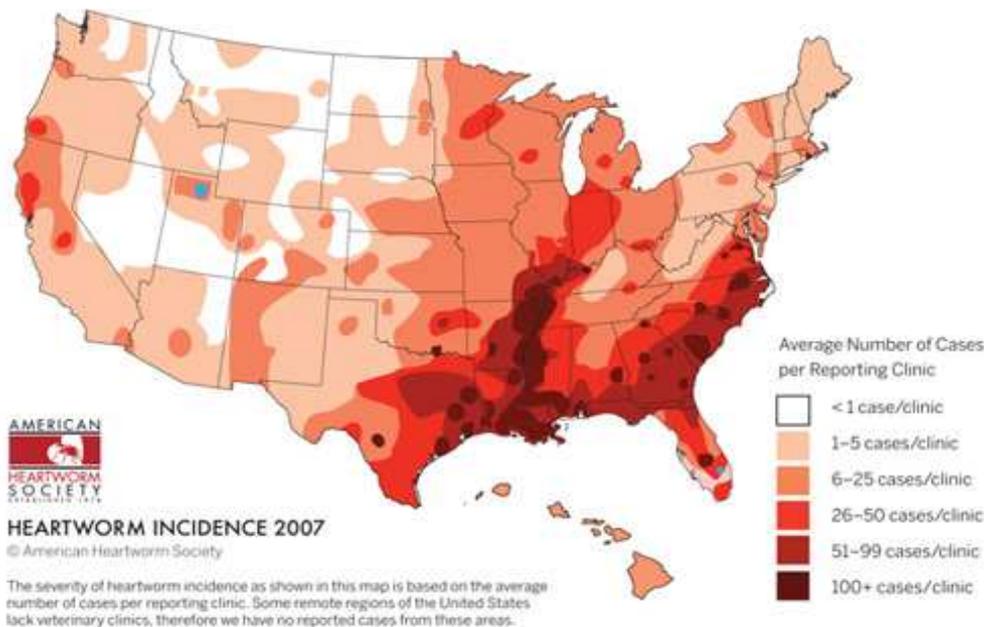
Heartworms

Heartworm Life Cycle

Heartworms have a long life cycle. It first begins by a mosquito ingesting the heartworm larva from an infected dog when taking a blood meal. The larva develops further while inside the mosquito and then migrates to the mouthparts. The larvae are introduced into a non-infected dog when the mosquito carrying the larva bites it. The larvae take approximately 70 days to develop into worms and travel to the heart through the blood stream. By day 120, the worms have developed into adults and occupy the heart and surrounding vessels, ready to begin reproduction.

Prevalence of Heartworm Disease

Heartworms have been diagnosed in all 50 states. It is more common in the wet and humid areas. 100% of the dogs bitten by an infected mosquito will develop heartworm disease unless they are on a preventative program.



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Signs of Heartworm Disease

Heartworm disease is difficult to diagnose in the early stages. Many dogs are not significantly affected until there is a large infection. Early signs may include a mild persistent cough, reluctance to exercise, fatigue after mild exercise, decreased appetite and weight loss. If heartworms are left undiagnosed for a long period of time it will lead to congestive heart failure, difficulty breathing, fainting, and even death.

Treatment of Heartworm Disease

Treatment of heartworm disease involves injections of harsh chemicals into the muscle. There are several diagnostic procedures that are recommended prior to treatment to insure the dog is healthy and stable enough to undergo this treatment route. The recovery period is generally 2-3 months in most cases. Dogs must be monitored closely at home and activities must be restricted to leash walks only.

Preventative Recommendations

Prevention of heartworm disease is much safer and more economical than treatment once infection develops. All puppies under 6 months old can be started directly on a heartworm preventative. Preventatives generally consist of a chewable tablet given once monthly. Any puppy over 6 months or adult dog that has not been on a preventative must be tested for heartworms prior to beginning a preventative program. A heartworm test is a simple blood test that requires only a few drops of blood to run. **The American Heartworm Society recommends all dogs be tested yearly for heartworm disease even if they are on a preventative program.**



For more information visit: heartwormsociety.org