

## HEARTWORM IN DOGS

As fall approaches, we all look forward to pleasant temperatures and long walks in the park. Sometimes, however, mosquitoes that seem to appear from nowhere, especially around dusk, can disrupt these idyllic pleasures. These pesky insects can pose a real danger to our pets. I am referring to heartworm disease. In an afflicted dog, spaghetti-like worms invade the heart cavity and major vascular pathways. Dead worms fragment and shower the capillaries in the lungs with small particles that block blood flow and rupture the vessels. Sadly there is not much we can do to reverse the damage caused by heartworm. The good news is that it is easy to protect our pets from this insidious disease. Topical products, such as Revolution™, tablets or injections that protect against heartworm for six months are all very effective.

“It is better to prevent canine heartworm rather than treat it.” That is the motto of veterinarians who see dogs with heartworm and are called upon to treat them. Years ago, before preventative treatments were readily available; I had to treat many dogs with heartworm. Even with expensive treatment, many dogs succumbed to complications. We have a very limited array of medications to treat heartworm, and they require painful injections in the lumbar muscles. Depending on the severity of the disease, two or three injections may be needed. Each treatment is an emotional roller coaster for the concerned owner and the hospital staff.

Recently we had to treat a beautiful, young, husky mix named Smoking Ed. During a routine exam, Smoking Ed tested positive for heartworm. Additional tests and x-rays proved that he had Stage 3 heartworm disease. His symptoms included weakness and exercise intolerance. The first injection made this once active dog very weak. So weak, in fact, that his tail never wagged for a full three weeks. Happily, two more injections did the trick, and I am elated to report that Smoking Ed is a heartworm survivor.



Smoking Ed's appreciative owners are eager to help me spread the word about how important it is to protect our pets against heartworm with the simple measures described above. The old adage, an apple a day keeps the doctor away, still holds true. Simple, preventative medicine can save your dog's life and keep us all smiling when we take our dogs for routine visits to the vet.

Please note: Although I have devoted this column to discussing heartworm in dogs, cats are also susceptible to heartworm. Even indoor-only cats can encounter mosquitoes and become infected. Similar preventative measures are available for feline use. However, you must NEVER use a product made for dogs on cats.