

FELINE HARD DISEASE

Medicine is an ever-evolving scientific discipline. As we get to know more, we need to do our best to protect our pets. I am going to tell you about an often overlooked and misdiagnosed condition called HEARTWORM ASSOCIATED RESPIRATORY DISEASE, or HARD.

Even cats that visit the veterinarian regularly are at risk because HARD is often misdiagnosed as feline asthma or other respiratory problems. There are some myths or misunderstandings about feline heartworm disease.

Myth One: Dogs vs. Cats

Heartworm disease is not just a canine (dog) disease. Heartworms affect cats differently from dogs, but the disease they cause is equally serious.

Myth Two: Indoor vs. Outdoor Cats

It only takes one mosquito to infect a cat. Because mosquitoes can easily get indoors, both indoor and outdoor cats are at risk.

Myth Three: It's a Heart Disease

The name "heartworm disease" is a misnomer. Heartworm disease mostly affects the lungs, not just the heart. Symptoms are often mistaken for feline asthma, allergic bronchitis or other respiratory diseases.

Myth Four: Adult Heartworms vs. Larvae

Cats do not need an adult heartworm to exhibit clinical signs; in fact, larvae are a main cause of the problems. Studies show that 50% of cats infected with heartworm larvae have significant disease of the small arteries supplying blood to the lungs.

Diagnosis is difficult. Negative antigen and antibody tests rule out heartworm disease. Positive tests, however, are significant. Signs associated with HARD may include anorexia, blindness, collapse, convulsions, coughing, diarrhea, difficulty breathing, fainting, lethargy, rapid heart rate, sudden death, vomiting, and weight loss.

As you can see, HARD is a serious disease that can be difficult to pinpoint. The good news is that feline heartworm disease is easily prevented. Contact your veterinarian and find out how you can protect your furry, feline friend.

