

August 2013

I have a goal...to never see another dog or cat with heartworm disease. I know this is an unachievable goal but it is a goal non-the-less. I am amazed at the number of heartworm disease cases I see when it is highly preventable.

The southern part of this country is very prone to heartworm disease. This is due to several factors:

- (1) The large mosquito population which is promoted by the hot humid climate. Remember it is the mosquito that transmits the active heartworm larva to the dog and cat.
- (2) Many of our dogs and cats are not given monthly preventative. In fact only about 40% of pet owners give their pets heartworm preventative.
- (3) Bladen County and the surrounding counties have a large stray dog and cat population which leads to a large pool of infected animals.

Heartworm disease is a deadly disease caused from the organism *Dirofilaria immitis*. The adult worms live in the pulmonary (lung) vasculature and extend into the right side of the heart as they grow. The population of worms grow as the untreated pet is bitten by more and more infected mosquitos. The pet can actually become a harbor of infection for itself. As the population of worms increases so does the damage to the heart leading to congestive heart failure.

With the products available, heartworm disease is almost 100% preventable. The companies that provide these medications actually guarantee their products and will pay for heartworm treatment if your pet contracts heartworm disease while on their product.

Heartworm disease is a national and international problem but is certainly worse in the warmer climates. The American Heartworm Society ([www.heartwormsociety.org](http://www.heartwormsociety.org)) highly recommends all pets living below the Mason-Dixon Line receive monthly heartworm preventative year round. Our southwestern climate promotes mosquito populations year round.

Recently a resistant strain of heartworm has been discovered called MP3 (Miss Piggy 3) named after the first dog carrying the strain. If your pet is diagnosed with heartworm disease and there was no lapse of monthly preventative it is likely MP3 strain. This is a scary situation and a very strong reason to have your pet tested on an annual basis. This practice is also strongly recommended by The American Heartworm Society ([www.heartwormsociety.org](http://www.heartwormsociety.org)). The good news, however, is the guarantee held by the manufacturer of your heartworm preventative would still cover the cost of heartworm treatment.

So...I know my goal is unachievable but I believe we (you and me) can make a difference. The take home message is to have your animal companion tested yearly for heartworm disease and to provide year round monthly preventative.

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