



Animal Clinic, LLC

A tradition of excellence and commitment to caring.

Canine Heartworm Disease

It's springtime in Colorado, and time to start thinking about heartworm disease and heartworm prevention for your dog. Heartworm is caused by a parasite called *Dirofilaria immitis* and is spread by mosquitoes. When a mosquito, carrying infective heartworm larvae, bites a dog and transmits the infection, the larvae grow, develop and migrate in the body over a period of several months to become sexually mature male and female worms. These reside in the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels. As mature adults, the worms mate and the females release their offspring. Heartworm disease may cause a combination of medical problems in the dog including dysfunction of the lungs, heart, liver and kidneys. Heartworm disease is relatively easy to prevent, but can be difficult and expensive to treat in dogs that have adult heartworm disease.

The key point is prevention. There are a variety of medications available for use in preventing heartworm infection, including monthly tablets and monthly topicals. Monthly administration of these products prevents the infective larvae from advancing in its life cycle and becoming an adult. It is important to remember that these products *prevent* heartworm infection, but are not effective in *treating* adult heartworm disease.

The American Heartworm Association recommends annual heartworm testing. This test takes about five minutes to run and requires only a few drops of blood.

If you have any questions, please call us at the Animal Clinic and we would be happy to chat with you or schedule an appointment.