

Don't risk it, take action to prevent heartworm

Consider heartworm prevention to be the most important thing we do at my clinic.

Sure, lots of what we see can be pretty bad. A dog who bit into the spinning blade of a power saw. A cat trapped in the engine when the owner started the car. A dog growing a tumor so big it looks more like a tumor growing a dog.

Although dramatic, these are the rare moments when medicine looks as exciting as an E.R., with everyone running around and using cool medical words like "stat," or "intubate." The greater risk to your pet comes quietly every day, and that's the stealth danger makes heartworm a terrible problem.

Mosquitoes carry heartworms by drinking from an infected dog, picking up a larva, then carrying it to an uninfected dog. The larva goes through changes in dogs and mosquitoes, reaching a spaghetti-like adulthood in the heart of an infected poach.

About Animals



DR. BRAD DAVIS

4 times the state average of heartworm every year. Sometimes the affected dogs have never been on preventive. Other times the owners tried to save a few dollars and only dosed their dog part of the previous year.

An elderly gentleman once explained to me that his dog did not need heartworm preventive. He kept his Chihuahua inside, away from insects, and thus he knew his dog was safe from heartworm. His dog was being treated for a bee sting.

Whether they were on preventive part of the year or not at all, I find few things less fun than calling someone to tell someone that their seemingly healthy pet has this awful dis-

ease. A heartworm positive dog can receive treatment, although it can be expensive, and can be risky. New treatments over the last few years have lowered the danger significantly from the old days when treatment basically involved giving a big enough arsenic injection to kill the worms, and hoping it wasn't enough to kill the dog.

The best news about heartworm involves how easily we can prevent it. A dog correctly given heartworm preventive year-round should never ever get heartworm. Period.

So as bad as the disease sounds (thin white worms filling part of your dog's heart, possibly leading to permanent damage, even death), you can make sure it never happens fairly easily.

Vets can prescribe a number of different preventives. Some look and taste like beefy cubes (I'm told...I've never tasted one), others are chewable

tablets. Some are topicals, placed on the skin. A new product involves a vet visit and injection every 6 months. Some of these also prevent other parasites, such as intestinal worms. Talking to your vet should help you find the preventive that best suits your pet and pocketbook.

Get your pet tested

You do have to get your dog's annual heartworm test before starting the medication. This simple blood test looks for the evidence of adult worms in the heart, much like searching for the worms' fingerprints in the blood (I know, they don't have fingers, but play along with me).

A client called a few weeks back, wanting to pick up the heartworm preventive. I advised them that their pet needed a test before I could dispense the cubes. They became upset with me, and argued that the test was unimportant. They also pointed out many faults I never knew I

had, but I think they were just being cranky.

The test lets us know if your pet has the disease and should be treated, or lets us know your pet is negative and we can start the preventive safely. Also, testing in the manner your veterinarian recommends enables the manufacturer's preventive manufacturers place on their products.

By the way, we now recognize that cats also get heartworm disease. The worms have somehow gotten a kitty-cat road map and can find their way to the feline heart (and you thought the way to a kitty's heart was through catnip and a warm lap). Cats with heartworm disease face a greater problem than dogs, as there's no great treatment besides open-heart surgery. Yes, you should ask your vet about getting your cats tested and on the prevention.

So, when people ask me about the need for heartworm prevention, I am reminded of the emergency room doctor

who won't start his car until everyone has their seatbelts on. He knows the importance of seatbelts from the traumas he sees in his emergency room.

I know the importance of heartworm prevention from the heartworm positives I see at my clinic.

Take Home Message: Heartworm disease continues to be a major problem in our area. Make sure your pets get tested and on preventive every year. No one ever wishes they hadn't gotten their animal on preventive, but too many end up wishing they had.

Dr. Brad Davis is the Medical Director for the VCA of Garden City, 2085 Inhater Road, Garden City, MI 48136. Feel free to write him through questions and comments. He is also one of the hosts of the nationally syndicated radio show Animal Talk. Visit the web site at www.AnimalTalkRadio.com. You can send E-mail questions or comments to DrBrad@AnimalTalkRadio.com.

Programmable thermostat will save you money

There are many ways to conserve energy in your home. One of the simplest is to install a programmable thermostat. There are several types of programmable thermostats available. A moderately priced unit will run about \$45.

Installation is simple enough for the beginning do-it-yourselfer. First, turn off the power to the heating and air-condition-

ing system and remove the old thermostat cover plate. Then unscrew and remove the thermostat body. Remove the thermostat base by loosening the mounting screws and tape the labeled wires to the wall to keep them from falling into the wall cavity.

Thread the low-voltage wires through the base for the new thermostat and, using the

screws included, mount the new thermostat on the wall. Connect the low-voltage wires to the screw terminals using the manufacturer's instructions as a guide.

Install the batteries in the thermostat body and then attach the body to the thermostat base. Turn on the power, and you are ready to program it as desired.

GARDENING CALENDAR

Send items for Gardening Calendar to "Gardening Calendar" Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009, or fax (248) 644-1314, or e-mail Ssteinmueller@oe.homecomm.net

MICHIGAN ORCHID SOCIETY

Meets 2:30 p.m. Sunday, April 21, at the First Baptist Church of Birmingham, 300 Willis Road, Birmingham. The meeting is free and open to the public. You'll be able to learn more about orchids. There will also be plants for raffle. At this meeting, the society presents Dana Harrison from Orchids by Hausermann out of Illinois, who will speak on "How to have orchids in bloom twelve months a year." He'll also have plants available for sale.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN WORKSHOP

Sponsored by the Hardy Plant Society, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, April 20 in Troy. Dr. Robert Schultzi, an associate professor at Michigan State University, will discuss plant selection and installation. To participate, make check for \$20, payable to the Hardy Plant Society, and send to 323 E. Lovell Drive, Troy, 48065. For more information e-mail hardyplantsociety@comcast.net or call (248) 978-2310.

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