

# Heartworm Disease

Although it isn't a huge problem in Colorado, heartworm disease is on the rise. Below you will find information about transmission, disease process and treatment, and prevention.

Heartworm disease is transmitted by mosquitoes, and we all know these critters are present in Colorado. In order for heartworm disease to be transmitted, certain humidity and temperature conditions must exist. We have determined May through October to be heartworm season in the Denver metro area. After transmission by the mosquito, heartworm larvae travel through the bloodstream to the heart and become adult worms. This image depicts the lifecycle of heartworm (adapted from the American Heartworm Society).

Clinical signs of heart disease generally are not apparent for several months to even years. The heartworm infestation leads to heart disease, which is sometimes characterized by weakness, exercise intolerance, cough, wheezing and other signs. Eventually heart disease leads to heart failure and death. Treatment of heartworm disease is accomplished by administration of medications that kill both adult and larval stages. Treatment is more successful early in the disease, and complications do occur secondary to dying adult worms in the heart. Therefore, prevention is desirable.

Detection of heartworm disease is easily done with a simple blood test. We recommend annual testing, and if negative we advise the use of preventive medications from May through October. Preventive medications are monthly treatments that halt the development of larvae into adults and prevent the resultant heartworm disease. Preventive therapy is safe and economical.

