

***Heartworm Disease:
What to know and how to prevent it in your dog***

Almost 300,000 cases of Heartworm Disease occur in dogs and cats each year in the United States. Although Heartworm disease is less common in the Bay Area than in other parts of the country, ***positive cases still occur here regularly.*** In fact we have just had a positive result confirmed here at our practice from just blocks away- in a largely backyard dog. Since heartworm is spread through mosquito bites, your dog can easily be exposed even in its own backyard or home.

Heartworm disease causes great physical stress to dogs, as well as great emotional and financial stress to their families. Left untreated it is eventually fatal. Heartworm is largely a silent killer, as most dogs are asymptomatic until advanced stages of the disease set in and the heart is severely affected. Therefore a ***Heartworm test is the only way to determine your pet's status.***

The Staff of Oak Grove Veterinary Hospital strives to do all it can to keep your pet healthy and to save you money. The best way to do this is to keep your dog on Heartworm preventative ***all year round.*** It is especially crucial to give continuous preventative if you live in an area with heavy mosquito populations or often visit areas that do- such as campgrounds, sea and lakeside, or mountain areas.

The Heartworm disease preventative which we recommend is Heartgard Plus. It ***tastes good and is fed just once each month to your dog.*** For dogs with pickier taste buds, we have Heartgard Tablets (pill form) as well. Heartgard Plus has been the leading product for Heartworm prevention since the monthly preventatives were introduced and we feel it is the most effective product still. Since Heartgard Plus is a prescription medication, annual exams are required for refills.

Prior to starting Heartgard Plus for the first time, ***ADULT dogs must be tested for Heartworm disease*** to confirm that they are negative. Dogs under 7 months may directly start Heartgard Plus. Not testing prior to beginning Heartgard Plus can be dangerous for your adult pet, as administering it may cause adult worms in the heart to break down releasing pieces of them into the bloodstream. As long as your dog remains continually on Heartgard Plus, further Heartworm tests will not be required by us unless it is considered beneficial for related medical diagnostics. If your dog misses more than 3 months of Heartgard Plus, a heartworm test is strongly recommended before restarting it.

We do, however, require an annual heartworm test in order to issue a written prescription to be filled elsewhere, as we cannot accurately follow usage of the medication. Due to reports of illegal and unsafe prescription practices, we highly suggest avoiding the purchase of Heartworm Preventative or any other medications from online/catalog companies. If you choose to refill your prescriptions through these channels, please be aware all Manufacturer warranties are voided by purchasing from non-Veterinarians. With the cost of shipping and an annual heartworm test, it is more expensive to go this outside route. If you have further questions regarding this policy towards outside vendors, please ask for a written copy from one of our staff.

We thank you for giving us the chance to provide the best medical care possible for your dog. Preventative Medicine is the best way for us to do that efficiently and economically. If you have any questions, please ask our staff or bring them up to the Doctor on your next visit.