

Featured Article: Heartworm Disease

Sometimes the best treatment is prevention. Such is the case for heartworm disease, caused by an infection from a parasite known as *Dirofilaria immitis*. The parasite is transmitted by the bite of a mosquito, and as we all know, April showers bring... mosquitoes. The result is a painful and expensive treatment regiment. Heartworms are a potential threat in any part of the country as well as elsewhere.



The parasite's life cycle begins when a mosquito carrying worm larvae (called *microfilariae*) bites a dog. The larvae are then passed to the bloodstream of the dog, where they eventually settle in the heart and blood vessels around the lungs. They then mature into adults over a period of around 6 months, during which time detection of the infection can be difficult and dogs are usually asymptomatic. Finally, the adults produce their own young, which can be passed along to another animal via a fresh mosquito bite. Meanwhile, the adults can continue to live in the host animal upwards of 5 years, causing coughing and weakness, or, in advanced cases, heart failure. It's important to note that cats are susceptible to heartworm too, though they're at lower risk, especially if they live indoors.

The earlier heartworm disease is diagnosed and treated, the higher the likelihood your pet will recover with fewer complications. Treatment is done with a combination of monthly heartworm preventative, antibiotics, and a de-worming medication known as melarsomine hydrochloride, however the treatment process itself carries its own risks, as even dead worms can damage blood vessels. Cage rest is required along with follow-up checks six months after starting a de-worming treatment.

Main Street Animal Hospital uses Interceptor Plus to prevent heartworm. The American Heartworm Society recommends giving your pet a monthly heartworm preventative year-round and doing annual testing for heartworm. If you have questions about heartworm prevention or treatment for your pet, just ask one of our veterinarians.

Raw Diets: Good or Bad?

Many advertising dollars have been spent lately promoting the supposed benefits of raw pet foods. Is there any merit to their claims?

To date, there are no conclusive studies that back up the claim that raw food is beneficial to pets. Conversely, there is evidence that raw diets increase your pet's likelihood of being exposed to disease-causing bacteria or parasites, such as *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, or *Campylobacter*. These same risks extend to the pet owner as he/she prepares the food. Additionally, raw diets are typically not nutritionally balanced.

Currently, the CDC, the American College of Veterinary Nutritionists, and the American Animal Hospital Assn. do not recommend raw pet food diets.

Staff Profile

Lauren Young, Vet Tech



Lauren started working with animals at the age of 16 as a kennel assistant. She joined Rockhill Veterinary Associates in 2004 and continued through the transition to Main Street Animal Hospital in 2006. She is a 2005 graduate of Delaware Valley University.

Lauren shares her home with her dog ("Rocky"), several rescue cats, and a bearded dragon.