

Dog Heartworm

Dog Heartworm is a disease which is spread by mosquitos, particularly by common Saltmarsh Mosquitos *Aedes vigilax* and is likely to be spread by the Dengue Fever Mosquito *Aedes aegypti*.

The Saltmarsh Mosquito *Aedes vigilax* is one of the most common mosquitos on the Central Queensland Coast and regularly occurs in extremely high numbers. It is capable of travelling 50km from its larval breeding site.

As heartworm is spread by mosquitoes, indoor dogs that don't mix with other dogs are also susceptible to the disease. For the disease to be spread, a mosquito must bite a heartworm positive dog and then bite your dog, which is why having all pets on heartworm prevention greatly reduces the spread of the disease.

Cats, foxes and dingoes also get heartworm from mosquitoes. For cats, just one heartworm tends to be fatal. Foxes and dingoes living on the fringes of urban areas act as a reservoir for the disease, which is why heartworm is unlikely to ever be eradicated.

Symptoms:

Dogs with heartworm tend to cough and lose weight gradually, but only when the heart damage is irreversible. Later signs include coughing up blood and sudden death. Early detection and prevention are the key strategies of keeping your dog safe and healthy.

Heartworm prevention:

Yearly heartworm injections or a monthly preventative medication are the best way to prevent heartworm infection. The disease is costly to treat and usually fatal by the time it's diagnosed so prevention is much better than cure.

If your dog has:

- never had a heartworm preventative medication or
- has had a break in medication for over three months, or
- you are not sure about whether your heartworm treatment is up to date

Visit your vet to have your treatments checked or have the vet conduct a heartworm test.

Pets with established heartworm disease can have an acute anaphylactic reaction to a treatment if they happen to already have the disease.

Although this is incredibly rare, it is a simple test to do and if heartworm is diagnosed at this early stage, the treatment is much safer than if heart damage has already occurred.

