

This Dog Is Heartworm Positive... What Does This Mean?

What Are Heartworms? Heartworms are parasites which are spread by mosquitoes from one dog to the next. The "baby" worms start in the bloodstream and then end up in the heart and lungs. Six months after the initial infection, they are in the heart and can be diagnosed with a blood test.

What Harm Do They Cause? Once the worms are in the heart and lungs, they cause damage to those organs. The amount of damage depends on how many worms and how long they have been there. Eventually, congestive heart failure can result. In addition, the abnormal blood flow caused by the worms can lead to kidney or liver damage. If a piece of heartworm breaks off, it can cause an embolism to the lungs or brain, leading to severe respiratory distress or sudden death.

What Symptoms Can Occur? Coughing, exercise intolerance, weight loss, breathing difficulty, or sudden death can occur.

Can Heartworm Disease Be Cured? It depends on the severity of heartworm disease in that particular dog. The heartworms can be eliminated in all dogs but if organ damage has already occurred, there may be continuing symptoms. By staging the heartworm disease, we can determine whether or not there is likely to be long term damage.

What Is Staging of Heartworm Disease? There are three stages. Stage 1 is a dog with no symptoms yet, a normal physical exam, and no abnormalities on x-rays or blood work. Dogs with stage 1 disease are unlikely to have organ damage yet and will likely make a full recovery after treatment. Stage 2 indicates there are mild symptoms, a normal physical, and/or minor changes on diagnostic tests. These dogs may make a full recovery with treatment or might have some long term problems. Stage 3 indicates severe symptoms, abnormalities on physical exam, and/or lab test abnormalities. These dogs are likely to have long term problems and are at high risk for complications if treatment is attempted.

Should I Adopt a Heartworm Positive Dog? As long as you (or a generous sponsor) is able to pay for heartworm treatment, adopting a stage 1 dog will probably work out great. There is a small risk of complications during treatment, but once treatment is finished, the dog will likely live a normal life. Stage 2 dogs also have a good chance of recovering. The Oconee Animal Control chooses humane euthanasia for dogs with stage 3 disease due to the likelihood of complications with treatment and a shortened life span.

How can I make a donation to treat Heartworm Positive Dogs? Oconee County Animal Control is accepting donations to cover the cost of treatment of Stage 1 and Stage 2 positive dogs with the objective of giving them the opportunity to be eligible for adoption. You can contact Oconee Animal Control at 864-888-0221, email at ocas@netmds.com or stop by the Oconee Animal shelter and ask to speak with Jaime.