

TAKING ON TOUGH QUESTIONS



AMERICAN HEARTWORM SOCIETY™
EST. 1974

FAQs ABOUT HEARTWORM DIAGNOSIS, PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

Q I have a canine patient that has tested antigen-positive, but the microfilaria test was negative. Should these results affect my treatment approach? – Dr. P.

THE SHORT ANSWER

A dog that tests positive for heartworm antigen needs to be treated for heartworms, regardless of the microfilaria status.

Chris Duke, DVM, Past President, AHS
Bienville Animal Medical Center
Ocean Springs, Mississippi

Lindsay Starkey, DVM, PhD, DACVM (Parasitology)
Associate Professor of Parasitology
Oklahoma State University

Dear Dr. P.,

Good work! By simultaneously running both an antigen (Ag) and microfilaria (MF) test on your patient, you are following the AHS heartworm testing guidelines. Running both tests when conducting either a routine heartworm screening or testing a patient you suspect to be heartworm-positive helps ensure that you will accurately diagnose your patient. Nevertheless, when you run both tests, it creates the possibility for varying results—with different potential interpretations (see “Heartworm Test Results and What They Mean”).

Mosquitoes can make either a withdrawal or a deposit when they bite an unprotected dog.

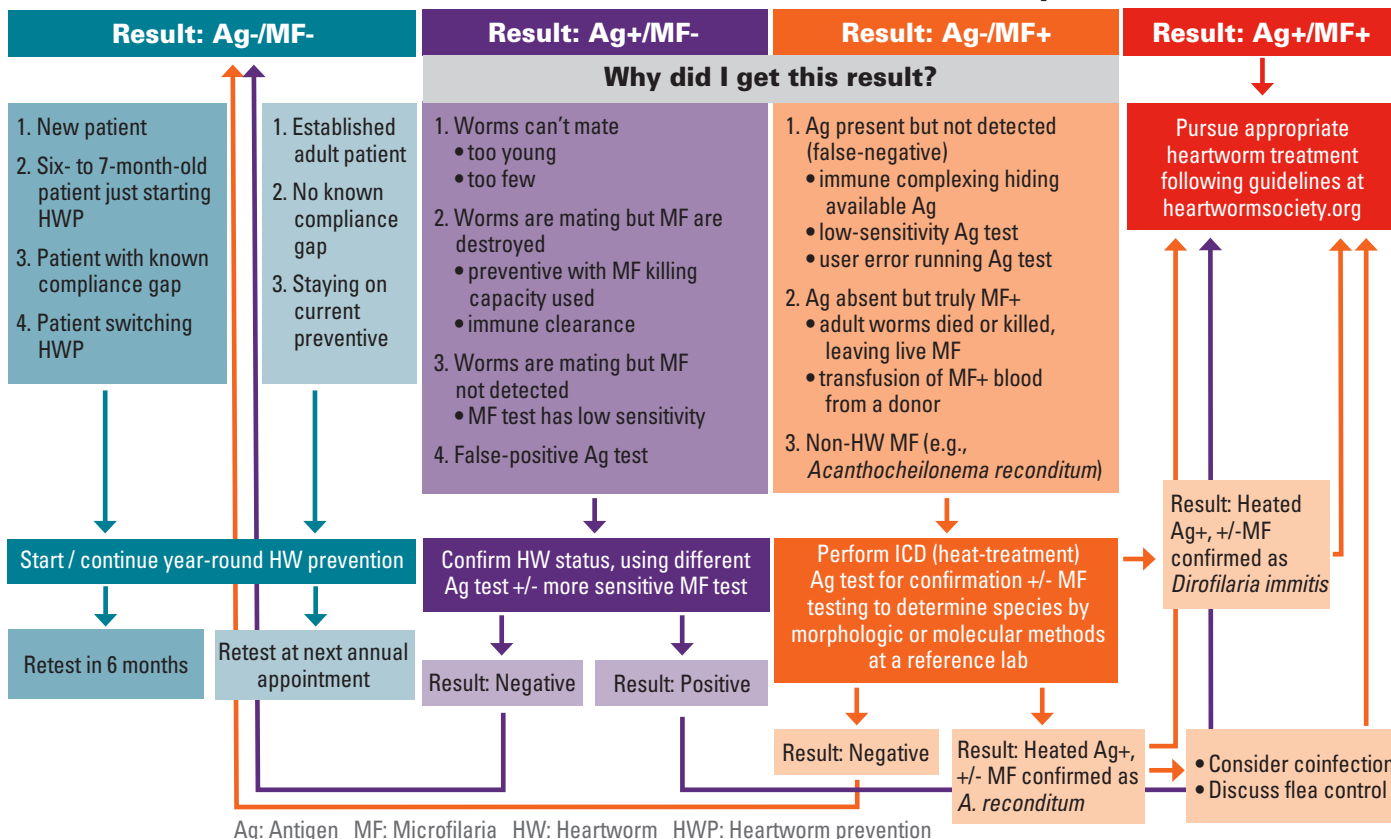
The withdrawal: If the dog has MF in its blood, they can pass to the mosquito when it feeds. Approximately 2-3 weeks later, the

heartworms will have matured to the infective larval stage and the mosquito can now transmit heartworms to a new host.

The deposit: If the mosquito is carrying infective heartworm larvae, the larvae will be passed to the dog through the bite wound. If not current on an approved heartworm preventive product, within 6 months, the dog will be carrying adult heartworms that can be detected on an antigen test. If there are enough of these adult heartworms, they can also reproduce and produce MF.

An Ag+/MF- test result on a heartworm test is not uncommon. Assuming the antigen test result is confirmed with a second Ag test, this result should have no bearing on the veterinarian’s treatment decision, nor will a lack of MF make any difference in clinical disease. ■

Heartworm Test Results and What They Mean



To access the complete set of AHS canine and feline heartworm guidelines, visit heartwormsociety.org