

Fact Sheet

A Walk on the Wild Side

A heartworm-infected animal in the vicinity of an unprotected pet poses an immediate threat. Mosquitoes are like the middleman in a business transaction: they ensure that the “product” – in this case, heartworm infection — gets from Point A to Point B. The trouble is that even if the number of infected dogs and cats is low in a given area, many wild animals living in and around cities, towns and farms can be deadly carriers of heartworm infection.

Mosquito as middleman

It’s not unusual to see foxes and coyotes in backyards across the country. For example, biologists caught and tagged nearly 200 coyotes living in city parks and among apartment buildings and industrial parks in the Chicago area over a six-year period. Although our pets don’t usually come in contact with these critters, the mosquitoes that bite both wild and domestic species expose pets to the infection the critters carry.

Why worry?

Heartworm-positive wildlife should give pet owners cause for concern.

- These animals are free roaming, so they can spread heartworm disease across wide geographical areas.
- Because wild animals are not given heartworm preventives, they serve as a constant source of infection.
- Even if our pets stay indoors, mosquitoes infected by a fox, wolf or coyote in the vicinity can bite them.



Heartworm disease is freely transferred from wild animals to pets through mosquito bites.

Prevention stops heartworm transmission

Since we can’t escape the potential for heartworm disease, the best thing we can do is protect our pets against it. Once a dog gets the disease, treatment is expensive, takes a long time and cannot always repair damage that’s been done to the heart. And because there’s no approved treatment for cats, the best your veterinarian can do for an infected feline is treat the symptoms.

Prevention is the best option. Keeping dogs and cats on year-round heartworm prevention is the best medicine. So think 12 – protect your pets every month, all year long.