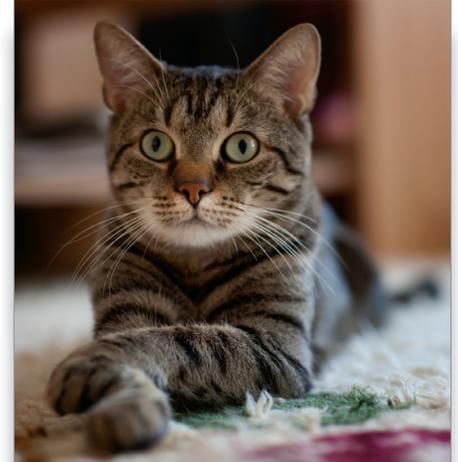


Fact Sheet

What if My Cat Tests Positive for Heartworm?

While many pet owners think heartworm disease only happens to dogs, cats are just as likely to be infected by mosquitoes. These infections are serious — and sometimes fatal — in both dogs and cats, but there are differences in the nature of the disease and in how it's diagnosed and managed.

Because a cat is not an ideal host for heartworms, some infections resolve on their own, although these infections can leave cats with respiratory system damage. Heartworms in the circulatory system also affect the cat's immune system and cause symptoms such as coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing. Heartworms in cats may even migrate to other parts of the body, such as the brain, eye and spinal cord. Severe complications such as blood clots in the lungs and lung inflammation can result when the adult worms die in the cat's body.



Diagnosing and managing heartworm disease in cats

While infected dogs may have 30 or more worms in their heart and lungs, cats usually have six or fewer — and may have just one or two. But while the severity of heartworm disease in dogs is related to the number of worms, in cats, just one or two worms can make a cat very ill. Diagnosis can be complicated, requiring a physical exam, an X-ray, a complete blood count and several kinds of blood tests. An ultrasound may also be performed.

Unfortunately, there is no approved drug therapy for heartworm infection in cats, and the drug used to treat infections in dogs is not safe for cats. Nevertheless, cats with heartworm disease can often be helped with good veterinary care. The goal is to stabilize your cat and determine a long-term management plan.

Here's the plan of action you should expect if your cat tests positive for heartworm:

Monitor your cat

Heartworm-positive cats may experience spontaneous clearing of heartworms. If your cat is not showing signs of respiratory distress, but worms have been detected in the lungs, chest X-rays every six to twelve months may be recommended. If mild symptoms are noted, small doses of prednisone may be administered to help reduce inflammation.

Provide veterinary care

If the disease is severe, additional support may be necessary. Your veterinarian may recommend hospitalization in order to provide therapy, such as intravenous fluids, drugs to treat lung and heart symptoms, antibiotics, and general nursing care. In some cases, surgical removal of heartworms may be possible.

Maintain prevention

A cat that has developed heartworm disease has demonstrated that it is susceptible to heartworm infection, and both outdoor and indoor cats are at risk. It's important to give your cat monthly heartworm preventives, which are available in both spot-on and pill form. Preventives keep new infections from developing if an infected mosquito bites your cat again. As a bonus, some preventives also protect cats against other parasites that can affect their health.

Heartworm disease is serious in cats, but many cases can be managed with good veterinary and home care. Meanwhile, healthy cats should be kept healthy with year-round heartworm prevention.