



Make Heartworm Preventive Reminders a Priority



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Q. How significant a problem is heartworm compliance?

- A. In a 2014 American Heartworm Society survey, veterinarians were asked if the incidence of heartworm disease in their area had increased over the past three years, decreased or stayed the same.
- Among the 21% of veterinarians who perceived a drop in incidence, 74% attributed the drop to more pet owners administering preventives, while 61% cited more preventives being administered year-round and on time.
 - Meanwhile, among the 19% who perceived an increase in heartworm incidence, 61% attributed the rise to poor compliance—either not administering preventives or failing to give doses on time.

Q. Pet owners today have many medication choices. Why should compliance even be a problem?

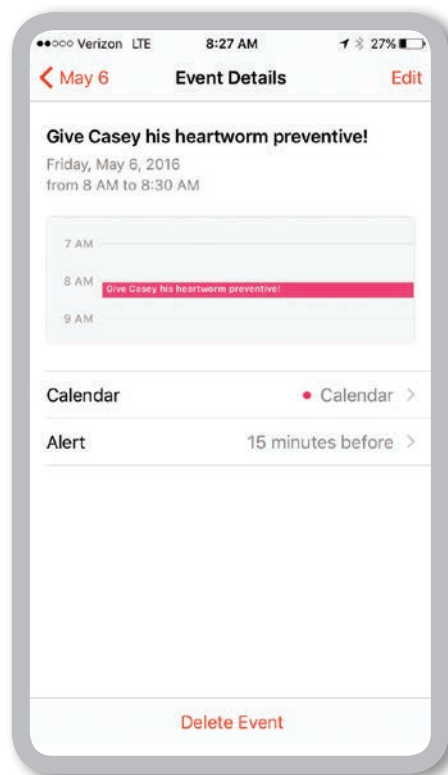
- A. I put the reasons in two categories:
- **Understanding the need for prevention.** Owners need to be convinced that heartworm presents a risk to their pet. In regions where heartworm disease historically has not been common or is considered to be seasonal, clients may be resistant to the idea of year-round prevention.
 - **Remembering to give preventives on time, every time.** Owners may have the best of intentions but still forget to give doses or give them late. I'm frank with my clients and tell them my own story. Back in the '90s, when monthly heartworm preventives replaced daily medications, my own dog turned up heartworm-positive. I subsequently discovered that I had only given nine of the 12 pills for the year. I simply hadn't acquired the right habit.

Q. How can veterinarians improve heartworm compliance?

- A. These are my top two suggestions:
- **Heartworm education.** Take the time with every owner to make sure they understand

the risk heartworm presents to their pet and the value prevention provides.

- **Heartworm reminders.** When I speak at meetings, I often ask how many veterinarians send reminders for heartworm testing. Roughly 80% raise their hands. But when I ask how many send reminders about heartworm preventives, only 20 – 25% do so. Most owners don't skip doses to save money—like me, they simply forget.



By finding a timely way to remind owners to protect their pet from heartworms and other parasites, we can equip them to provide the care they want to give.

The right reminder system can be anything from a year's supply of stickers for the family calendar to a timely text message or email. The important thing is to talk to clients and pick the right reminder method for them. ■