



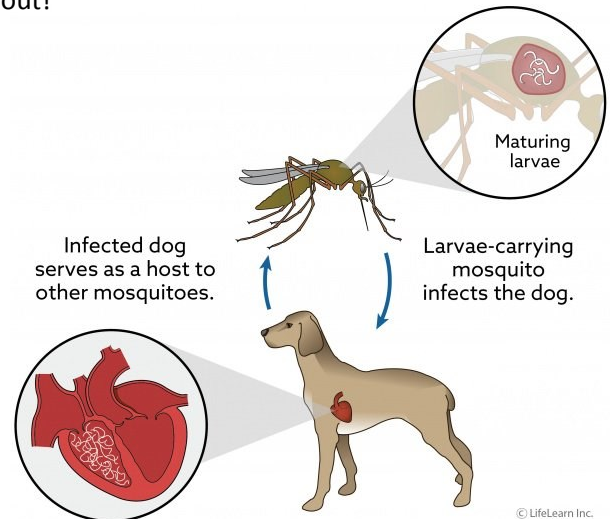
# HEARTWORM POSITIVE DOGS: FOSTER CARE

Canine heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease that, unfortunately, is very prevalent in North Carolina. Below is an explanation of heartworms, how the SPCA cares for these medical cases and how foster parents can play an active role in helping them recover.

For any medical concerns in relation to heartworm disease, please contact the Foster Coordinator at 919-630-9680 in order to assist with monitoring symptoms and coordinating appointments. For non-emergencies, email is also appropriate during business hours or if it can wait until the following day. **The Foster Coordinator will determine the location where a pet is seen based on the situation and availability of medical staff. The SPCA of Wake County must approve any and all treatments for foster pets.** When in doubt, always reach out!

## What is Heartworm disease and how is it transmitted?

Long white worms are the cause of heartworm disease. Adult worms, which can reach a length of 6-14 inches, live in the right side of the heart. Adult female heartworms produce offspring called microfilariae that float freely in the blood of an infected dog. When a **mosquito** feeds on the blood of a heartworm infected dog, it ingests the microfilariae, now making it a carrier of Heartworm disease. The adult heartworms if allowed to continue to develop and reproduce can cause extensive damage to the heart and lungs.



## Are all dogs at risk? Can my dog get heartworms from a dog that is positive?

All dogs are at risk of being infected with heartworms because it is transmitted by mosquitos. However, heartworms is not like intestinal worms and can't be passed from dog to dog. North Carolina has a higher incidence of heartworm disease because the mosquito season is longer due to our warm climate.

Heartworm Disease is easily preventable through the strict administering of monthly preventatives (in the form of chewable or flavored tablets). There are a variety of preventatives on the market, but the SPCA uses Heartgard which is provided for all dogs in our care, including fosters.

## What are some of the signs my foster dog may exhibit?

Heartworm disease isn't immediately fatal; a dog may live for a number of years showing no outward signs of this disease. At the point when your dog exhibits outward signs, it has progressed to the moderate or severe stage of Heartworm Disease. **The most common clinical signs include:** coughing, exercise intolerance, difficulty breathing, weight loss, anorexia, depression.

## How was my foster dog diagnosed with Heartworm disease?

A blood sample was drawn from this dog and an occult test was run. This test detects the presence of antigens (proteins) produced by adult heartworms. Every dog over 6 months old at the SPCA is tested for heartworm disease.

## What treatment is available for a dog with Heartworm Disease?

The good news is most dogs can be successfully treated for heartworms. Heartworm Disease treatment is both expensive and distressing for canines. Treatment involves killing the adult worms (adulticide) and killing the larval stages of heartworm (microfilaricide). The adulticide part of heartworm treatment involves three injections in the

muscle; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2nd injections are given a month apart. The 3rd injection is given the day after the 2nd, so they may stay overnight at the Adoption Center for the last 2. This treatment can be very hard on the dog and they must be kept extremely quiet for a period of several weeks to avoid post-treatment complications. The microfilaricide part of the treatment involves high doses of a medication given orally to kill the circulating microfilariae.

### **How much does heartworm treatment(s) cost?**

The total cost for heartworm treatment can vary greatly depending both on the severity of the infection (and thereby the number of treatments needed). While the SPCA absorbs the cost, the financial commitment can range from \$200.00 to upwards of \$1000.00 in severe cases and/or cases when the dog has medical complications. Any monetary donation that goes towards the care of dogs with heartworm disease in our care is greatly appreciated for this reason.

### **How does heartworm disease affect the adoptability of my foster dog?**

Potential adopters are given a choice when applying for a heartworm positive dog; they can either adopt as-is and treat the newly adopted dog with their veterinarian or choose to go through our **\*Foster-to-Adopt program**. Regardless of what they decide, we go over extensively the cost and care needed for a heartworm positive dog as part of the adoption process. In addition, we highly encourage they speak with their vet prior to making a decision.

**\*Foster-to-Adopt (FTA)** is only applicable for heartworm positive dogs because we understand that most adopters are unable to afford their medical care as-is which greatly reduces their options for forever homes. We do ask adopters participating in the FTA program to provide a monetary donation in addition to the standard adoption fee of \$95.00.

### **Foster Home Care:**

Physical exertion increases the rate at which heartworms can cause damage to the heart and lungs, so dogs must be kept as calm as possible before, during and up to 1 month after heartworm treatment.

- When home alone, they must be confined to a crate unless otherwise directed by the Foster Coordinator.
- Dog(s) must be kept on leash and harness when outside even for potty breaks in a fenced in yard.
  - Standard collars can cause damage to the trachea and induce excessive coughing.
  - ~30 minute walk intervals are ideal, 3 to 4 times a day. No running.
- Medication is provided by the SPCA and should not be discontinued for any reason unless directed by the Foster Coordinator/medical staff.
  - Certain medications can reduce bladder control, so accidents are not uncommon even for a house-trained dog.
  - Charts will be provided to help track when medications need to be given as they can be receiving 2-3 different meds at a time.
- If fostering during the hot, summer months, avoid walking during the middle of the day when the temperature is at it's peak. If you must take a lunch break, stick to the shade and limit to a 15 minute walk max.
- Provide lots of toy enrichment and work on fun training commands to keep dogs busy with their brains which will reduce the need for physical exertion.
- Foster dogs that are heartworm positive can interact with other dogs as long as they aren't going to play/rough house 24-7. Remember, they need to stay calm!

**Again, always call the Foster Line at 919-630-9680 for any questions or medical concerns for your foster dog!**