

# FELINE HEARTWORM DISEASE

## WHAT IS HEARTWORM DISEASE?

Heartworm disease is a potentially life-threatening condition caused by a parasitic worm called *Dirofilaria immitis*.



Unlike dogs, cats are not the natural host of this parasite, and while their infections are usually characterized by fewer worms and better outcomes than are seen in canine infections, feline heartworm disease can cause significant disease and can be fatal.

## SIGNS OF INFECTION



**NONE AT ALL**



**COUGHING**



**INCREASED  
RESPIRATORY  
RATE/EFFORT**



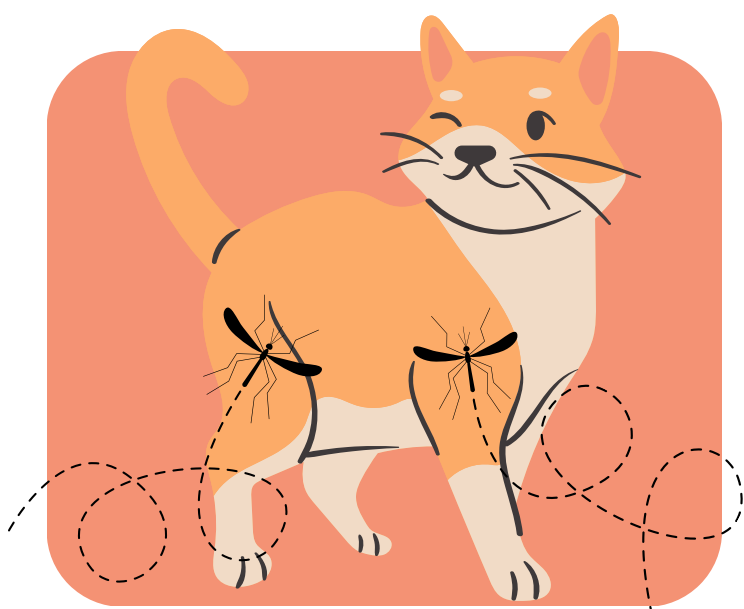
**DECREASED  
APPETITE**



**VOMITING**



**NEUROLOGIC SIGNS  
(INCOORDINATION,  
SEIZURES, BALANCE  
PROBLEMS)**

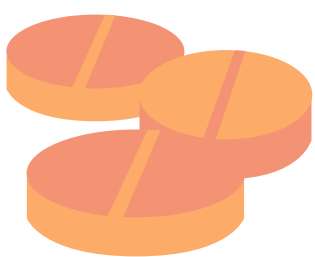


## HOW ARE CATS INFECTED?

Heartworm disease is transmitted by mosquitos. Cats are infected when a mosquito carrying heartworm larvae (usually obtained while biting an infected dog) bites them, allowing the larvae to enter the cat. The larvae then migrate through the tissues of the cat while maturing, usually

ending up in the heart and the blood vessels supplying the lungs, where they mature into adult worms that can cause damage to the blood vessels leading to the lungs and to the lungs themselves. Since cats are not the natural host of *D. immitis*, migrating larvae can sometimes travel to places other than the heart (often the central nervous system), a phenomenon called aberrant larval migration.

## HEARTWORM PREVENTION



There are a number of excellent heartworm preventative medications available for use in cats. All cats should receive year-round monthly heartworm preventative medication, even if they are housed strictly indoors. This is particularly important in warmer regions that sustain mosquito populations during either warmer months of the year or year-round.

## HOW IS HEARTWORM DISEASE TREATED?

If infected cats are not showing signs of disease, it may be reasonable not to treat them and to allow the infection to take its natural course to a spontaneous cure. Unlike in dogs, feline heartworm infections usually involve a relatively small number of worms that do not survive for nearly as long as they do in canine infections. Cats showing signs of disease may need therapy including **corticosteroids, antibiotics, bronchodilators, intravenous fluid therapy**, and/or **oxygen supplementation**, depending upon the severity of their disease.

