



GREENBRIAR VETERINARY HOSPITAL
9647 CLARK ROAD
DALLAS, TEXAS 75249
(972)296-9933

HEARTWORM DISEASE

Your dog has been diagnosed as having heartworms. Heartworm disease is caused by worms that live in the heart that grow to be 6-14 inches long. Large accumulations of these worms reduce blood circulation causing serious damage to the heart, lungs and liver. It is a serious and potentially fatal disease of dogs.

Heartworm infection has no visible symptoms until it reaches the advanced stages. At this time coughing, difficult breathing, weakness and tiring are the signs of a severe infection.

Heartworm infection can cause serious damage before any outward symptoms appear. Unless controlled, the disease can lead to heart failure and death.

HEARTWORM TREATMENT

Most dogs can be successfully treated if the disease is detected early and tailored to the stage of illness. Treatment involves admitting the dog to the hospital for injections of an arsenic compound given precisely according to the dog's weight that will kill the adult heartworms living inside the heart. The usual length of stay in the hospital is 1-3 days. The dead worms are then carried by the blood stream to the lungs where they are absorbed by the body over a period of time. To reduce complications, complete rest is needed for at least 2 months.

After the adult heartworms are treated, another drug is administered after 4 weeks to rid the bloodstream of immature worms called microfilaria. The dog spends one day in the hospital for this treatment. Occult cases (where there are no microfilaria) do not receive this treatment.

Two weeks after the microfilaria are treated, the first follow-up blood test is performed to assess the effectiveness of the treatment.

Four to five months after the initial treatment of all dogs another follow-up blood test is used to check the effectiveness of the adulticide treatment.

COMPLICATIONS

The following are some of the possible reactions and complications associated with heartworm treatment:

vomiting (most common)

coughing (very common)

pulmonary embolism (common)

anorexia

failure to kill all of the worms necessitating repeated treatment (10-30% reported)

local tissue reaction at injection sites

severe pulmonary hypertension

liver failure

kidney failure

disseminated intravascular coagulation

death

At present there is no reliable way to predict the occurrence of adverse reactions or complications of treatment.