

HOW TO CARE FOR A DOG AFTER HEARTWORM TREATMENT

Introduction

Heartworm disease is a serious but **treatable health problem**. It's caused by a **worm that resides in the heart and lungs** of dogs and cats and is transmitted from animal to animal by mosquitoes.

Heartworm **treatment is a set of injections that kill the heartworms** in a dog. It is extremely important that **they do so gradually**. Too sudden a worm kill can cause the dead worms to obstruct blood flow and **could be life threatening**.

CRITICAL



Home care after a dog has received heartworm injections is the single most important thing you can do to prevent harm related to heartworm disease during treatment.

The **goal of home care after heartworm treatment** injections is to maintain minimal to no symptoms for the entire post treatment period while the worms die slowly and are gradually destroyed by the body. **This requires strict exercise restriction**. Allowing a dog to run and play during this period is extremely dangerous (life-threatening) and **must be avoided**.



GETTING STARTED

- With minor variations, treatment of heartworm disease **typically takes 2-5 months to complete**. The most important thing you can do during the treatment is to **restrict your dog's physical activity to a bare minimum of short leash walks for potty breaks only**.



- Your dog will **first need to receive an antibiotic**, doxycycline, which weakens the heartworms and **makes the heartworm injections most effective**. You should give this antibiotic to your dog until the vet directs you to stop. Some dogs develop an upset stomach from this antibiotic, **so be sure to give with food**.
- Exercise restriction must begin immediately on the day of the first heartworm injection**. Most dogs will receive 2 injections given 24 hours apart. In more severe cases, injections are given as 2 sets: 1 injection initially, then 4-6 weeks later, 2 more injections given 24 hours apart, with an over night stay at the vet's office.

TROUBLESHOOTING BEFOREHAND

- All physical exertion must be stopped beginning the day of the first injection, 24 hours a day, for the full 6-week period**, to reduce the risk of serious (life-threatening) heartworm-related problems. Consider food puzzles, frozen peanut butter Kong, and treats to help keep your dog calm.

Contact your Foster Coordinator if you need more suggestions on how to keep your foster dog calm.

HOW DO I?

...CARE FOR MY DOG DURING TREATMENT?



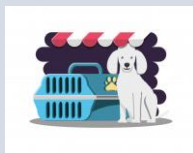
After receiving the first injection, your dog must remain as quiet and inactive as possible for the next 6 weeks (confine to crate or small quiet room). This may seem unfair, but the alternatives, namely untreated heartworm disease or treatment without restricting exercise, are worse and potentially life-threatening.



Dogs who are allowed to run or play during this time can develop life-threatening problems such as a stroke. Treatment makes the heartworms fragile, so the body can break them down slowly over the next 6 weeks. Allowing vigorous activity at any time in these 6 weeks can cause the weakened heartworms to shatter, causing a clot of worm fragments that blocks off blood flow to the lungs, brain, or other organs. This causes a stroke or sudden death. Conversely, exercise restriction means the worms are slowly broken down by the body until gone, with no symptoms or problems.



Short, slow leash walks (5-10 minutes) are appropriate for potty breaks, 2-3 times a day at most.



Respiratory symptoms are important if you see them: if your dog is acting abnormally, develops a new cough, or has difficulty breathing, you should call your Foster Coordinator promptly.



Continue giving monthly heartworm preventative.

AFTERWARDS



It is expected that with this approach, there will be no complications and you should see your dog acting, eating, breathing, and behaving normally during the treatment period. **Should your dog exhibit any of the symptoms mentioned, call your Foster Coordinator immediately.**

After your foster dog is 4 weeks out of heartworm treatment, you can slowly start to introduce activity back into your dog's routine.



A mosquito bites an infected dog and ingests tiny heartworm larvae.

These larvae develop into their infective stage.

The same mosquito bites another dog, the larvae infect the healthy animal.

Without preventive, the larvae continue to develop, eventually reaching the heart and lungs.

FAQ

Why do I have to give an antibiotic? Aren't the injections enough?

Doxycycline, the antibiotic of choice, amplifies the effectiveness of the injections while also reducing the risk of adverse effects. It kills an organism, *Wolbachia*, that lives inside heartworms and on which the heartworms depend. Thus, doxycycline weakens the heartworms and makes them more vulnerable to the adulticide injections. It's imperative to give the antibiotic treatment the entire time recommended by your veterinarian, barring symptoms of intestinal upset (loss of appetite, vomiting, which warrant a call to your Foster Coordinator).

How did my dog get heartworm disease?

Heartworms are carried by mosquitoes. An infected mosquito bit the dog, depositing the worm in the tissues.

Why is exercise restriction so important?

When the worms are dying off, they are slowly destroyed by the body. Increased activity can cause an embolus, or clump of worms, to form, blocking the circulation through the lungs. This can cause a stroke or sudden death.

Do the heartworm adulticide injections hurt?

No, the injections are painless. About 20% of dogs develop some inflammation over the injection site 2-5 days after injection, which creates soreness. Please handle the dog with care and contact your Foster Coordinator if pain persists.

Can my dog get heartworm disease from my foster dog?

No, heartworms are not contagious, meaning a dog cannot get the disease from being near an infected dog. Heartworms are only transmitted from the bite of an infected mosquito.

CONTACT YOUR FOSTER COORDINATOR IF...



Your dog is:

- Lethargic
- Vomiting
- Coughing
- Diarrhea
- Bleeding
- Blue Gums

Or shows any abnormal behavior

