

Fact Sheet

Puppies and Kittens Need Protection, Too



Protect them from the start

Puppies and kittens may be the picture of health — but their risk of getting heartworm disease is equal to that of adult pets. That’s why the American Heartworm Society recommends that puppies and kittens be started on a heartworm preventive as early as the product label allows, and no later than 8 weeks of age. Heartworms are found in all 50 states, so every young pet is at risk.

Monitor growth — and dosage

The dosage of a heartworm medication is based on body weight, not age. Puppies and kittens grow rapidly in their first months of life, and the rate of growth — especially in dogs — varies widely from one breed to another. That means a young animal can gain enough weight to bump it from one dosage range to the next within a matter of weeks.

For example, a large-breed dog such as a German shepherd typically weighs about 17 pounds at 4 weeks of age. By 8 weeks of age, he’s likely to tip the scales at 29 to 30 pounds. That’s nearly a doubling of body weight in one short month. And for some heartworm medications, that could mean a change from one dosage size to another.

Remember that different breeds of dogs mature at different rates. Small dogs tend to reach maturity much sooner than large and giant dogs. The weight of a Great Dane puppy, for instance, may need to be monitored for much longer than that of a Chihuahua to ensure the heartworm preventive dosage is correct.



Make a plan with your veterinarian

- You’re making the effort to protect your young pet from heartworm disease — go one step further and ask your veterinarian for advice about anticipating when a dosage change will be needed.
- Check into buying one or two heartworm preventive tablets at a time rather than 6 months’ worth, if a dosage change is anticipated. (There is a sustained-release injectable preventive available for dogs 6 months of age or older.)
- Bring your pet in for every scheduled well-puppy or well-kitten exam, so that you stay on top of all health issues, including heartworm protection.
- Confirm you are giving the right heartworm preventive dosage by having your pet weighed at every visit.

Prevent so there’s no need to treat

Starting heartworm preventive as soon as possible is one of the most important steps you can take to help ensure a long, healthy life for your young pet.