

# Post Heartworm Treatment Care for your New Dog



Your new dog has just received heartworm treatment. The following instructions are critical for insuring a decreased risk of complications. Heartworm treatment involves administration of an arsenic based drug which kills the adult form of the heartworm. This drug is injected into the muscle of the back just above the level of the hips. The most common side effect of heartworm treatment is injection site reactions. Many post-treatment dogs will be sore as a result of muscle injury from the injection. It is important to avoid putting pressure on this area as the dog may overreact to the associated pain. It is important to know where the injections occurred so that you can watch the sites to ensure that your new pet is not developing an injection site reaction or infection. If your dog remains painful for over a week or is continually bothering the area you should consult your veterinarian for further instructions.

As explained in the heartworm pamphlet included in your adoption packet, heartworms infest not only the heart but also the pulmonary arteries. After administration of heartworm treatment, these worms die and are swept to the lungs where they are broken down and digested. This process results in inflammation of the lungs and associated arteries. The important complication of heartworm treatment to be aware of is pulmonary thromboembolism. A thromboembolism is a clot of blood or dead worm which cuts off blood supply to an area of the lungs. Pulmonary thromboembolism is an inevitable consequence of successful adulticide therapy and may be severe if infection is heavy and pulmonary arterial disease is extensive. Be aware of and monitor for signs of embolism (low grade fever, cough, hemoptysis (blood in phlegm), difficulty breathing, increased respiratory rate, pale or blue gums, fatigue and the inability to sleep). If they are going to occur, they are usually evident within 7 to 10 days, but occasionally as late as four weeks after completion of adulticide administration. In most cases where the dog is clinically healthy but heartworm positive, only mild embolism in relatively healthy areas of lung occur and may be inapparent clinically.

A pivotal factor in reducing the risk of thromboembolic complications is to restrict exercise during the critical month following treatment. Dogs that have undergone heartworm treatment should be kept on strict rest. If the dog is calm while indoors, he/she can be allowed loose in the house to rest. However, if the dog is energetic and wants to run and play indoors, it should be crated to enforce exercise restriction. When outdoors the dog should remain leashed at all times and return indoors after he/she goes to the bathroom. You should not take your dog on long walks, runs, or to the dog park. A slow walk around your yard is sufficient 'exercise' for a recovering heartworm dog.

You should contact your veterinarian if you have any questions or concerns about heartworm treatment and care or if you witness any of the following:

- Persistent pain/irritation associated with the injection site
- Excessive panting, coughing or increased respiratory effort
- If the gums are not pink and moist
- Persistent lethargy and dullness
- Vomiting or diarrhea

We have put hundreds of dogs through heartworm treatment with few complications. By monitoring closely and following the above guidelines, you can help prevent potential complications from occurring in you new dog. If you are at all concerned, please call your veterinarian for further assistance as it is better to be overly concerned than to miss the development of a complication.

Heartworm treatment does not prevent future infections. To ensure that your new dog never has to endure heartworm treatments again, please administer monthly heartworm prevention as prescribed by your veterinarian. Heartworm preventatives include: Heartgard, Sentinel, Interceptor, and Revolution. Please see your veterinarian within 72 hours of bringing your new dog home so that you can ensure that you pick up the next dose of prevention before it is due to be administered.