

Heartworm Treatments:

Diagnosis:

A blood test is performed in-clinic to test your dog for heartworms. A test may be recommended if your pet is displaying symptoms of heartworm disease or if your pet has missed one or more months of heartworm preventative and it has been at least six months since the missed dose. Heartworms take approximately six months to develop to where they can be detected in the blood.

Heartworm Antigen Test: Detects specific [antigens](#) primarily found in adult female heartworms.

Microfilaria Test: The identification of the offspring ([microfilaria](#)) of heartworms from a blood sample indicates infection with adult heartworms.

Treatment: (this may change per your doctor's discretion)

Most dogs infected with heartworms can be successfully treated. It is important to try to accomplish this goal with a minimum of harmful effects from drugs and a tolerable degree of complications created by the dying heartworms. Heartworm infected dogs showing no signs or mild signs have a high success rate with treatment. Patients with evidence of more severe heartworm disease can be successfully treated, but the possibility of complications and [mortality](#) is greater. The presence of severe heartworm disease within a patient in addition to the presence of other life-threatening diseases may affect treatment possibilities.

To determine which treatment is right for your dog, a physical examination and diagnostic blood panel will be performed by your veterinarian. A diagnostic panel will determine if your pet has any liver or kidney issues/diseases that could be aggravated by treatment.

For dogs who qualify for full treatment:

Immiticide is the only FDA approved treatment for adult heartworms. It has demonstrated a higher level of effectiveness and safety than any other adult heartworm treatment previously available. It is administered by [intramuscular](#) injections into the [lumbar](#) muscles.

How the process works: Your pet will receive their treatment over a series of three visits to our office.

Visit #1: An injection of Immiticide given kills some of the worms in your pet's system and sets up pathways in the liver that allow the body to process future treatments. A dose of prednisone will also be given to help reduce the inflammation and swelling at the injection site. Your pet will stay at our facility for one night and will go home with strict instructions to remain inactive and restricted for 30 days.

Visit #2: A month later two injections are again given in higher doses. Another dose of prednisone will be given to your pet for inflammation and swelling at the injection site. Your pet will stay at our facility for two nights and will go home with strict instructions to remain inactive and restricted for 30 days.

Visit #3: A final oral treatment of larvacide kills the heartworm larvae in your dog's blood. The doctor may choose to do this before or after the Immiticide treatment depending on the number of microfilaria in your pets system.

Visit #4: 1 week after your pet is sent home a final blood test will be performed.

RESTRICTION IS KEY!!! THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE TREATMENT PROCESS.

Restriction is important because as the drugs are killing the worms in the arteries, the worms can break off and travel to block parts of the blood vessels (pulmonary thromboembolism or PTE). PTE results in obstruction of the blood flow to parts of the lung (pulmonary infarction). Keeping the dog quiet allows the body time to slowly break down and absorb the dying worms. Ideally, cage rest should be provided.

For dogs who DO NOT qualify for full treatment:

Some dogs may not be good candidates for treatment with Immiticide. These dogs can be placed on a monthly dose of ivermectin-based heartworm preventative medicine. However, though ivermectin does kill the larvae and shorten the lifespan of adult worms, while sterilizing them, it doesn't kill the adult heartworms and they will have to die off over time.

Additional Complications:

While a mild cough is expected, dogs who undergo treatment are subject to deep coughing, decreased appetite, vomiting and the risk of pneumonia. Should you notice any of these symptoms please let our office know immediately.