

# Heartworm Disease



## What type of pet is most susceptible to heartworms?

Dogs get heartworms much more commonly than cats, although the incidence of heartworms in cats is higher than once thought. Breed, sex and age do not affect your pet's susceptibility to heartworms. Both indoor and outdoor pets are at risk for heartworm infection. The disease is found in virtually all parts of the United States and Canada.

## What physical signs might my pet show when infected with heartworms?

Several signs might indicate the presence of heartworms in your pet. Talk to us right away if your pet shows the following physical signs:

- Sudden weight loss
- Difficulty breathing
- Soft, persistent cough
- Tires easily
- Listlessness or weakness

“Today more than 95% of the dogs with heartworm disease are treated successfully.”

Many of these signs are most noticeable after exercise. Heartworms clog the heart and/or the main blood vessels, reducing the blood supply to or from other organs such as the lungs and the liver. Major bodily functions, including breathing, are affected.

Erie Animal Hospital  
720 Austin Avenue • Suite 107  
Erie, Colorado 80516

**Hours of Operation**  
Mon, Wed, Thurs, Fri

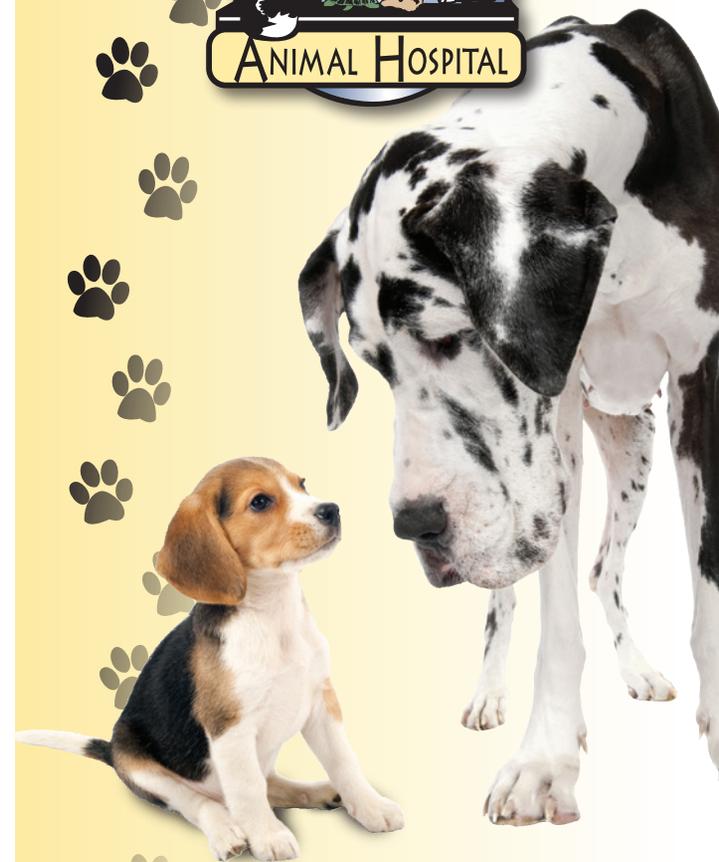
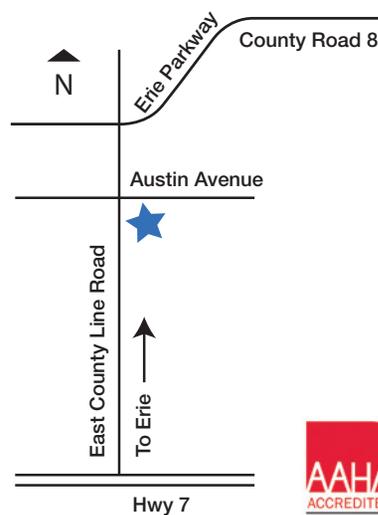
8 am to 6 pm

Tuesday 8 am to 7 pm      Saturday 8:30 am to noon

303-828-0373

The Doctors are available  
by appointment.

We also take emergencies during office hours. Please call our phone number for after hour emergency hospitals.

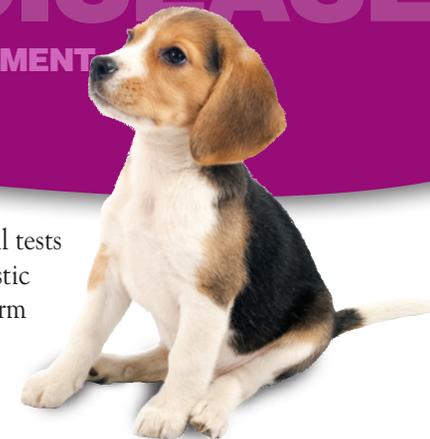


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## Heartworm Disease

Heartworms are parasites that invade a pet's circulatory system and heart. The adult heartworms produce offspring called "microfilariae", which circulate in the infected pet's blood.

A mosquito feeds on the blood of a pet that has already been infected, ingests the microfilariae, then transfers infective heartworm larvae into a healthy pet when it bites.

These heartworm larvae migrate through the pet's tissues and circulatory system and reach the heart in five to six months, where they arrive as small worms about two inches in length. Once they are in the heart, the adult worms grow and reproduce. They may reach a length of twelve or more inches and may stay in the pet's heart for several years. Heartworms cause heart and lung failure in those pet's infected by the parasite.

## How can I prevent heartworm disease in my pet?

Highly effective preventative medications are available and prescribed for pets that are not infected with heartworms or that have been successfully treated for heartworms in the past. We will test your pet for the presence of heartworm before prescribing medication.

These medications are given every 30 days and will prevent heartworm larvae from developing into adult heartworms. **It is crucial to administer all prescribed medications as directed.**

As a safeguard, we recommend annual screening tests, even for pets that are on heartworm preventative medication.

## How is heartworm disease treated?

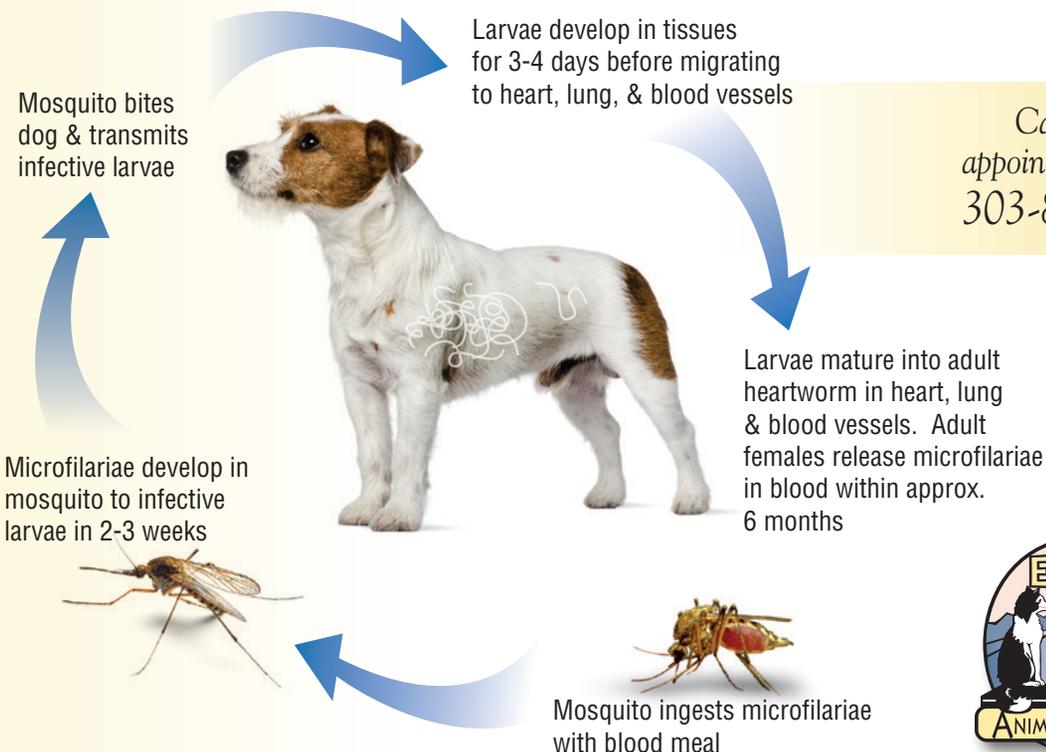
We start with a blood sample to determine the presence of heartworms. Additional tests may be necessary to confirm the presence of heartworms. Once confirmed, diagnostic testing may be required to determine whether or not your pet can tolerate heartworm treatment. These tests include, but are not limited to, additional blood-chemistry panels, radiographs (X-rays), and electrocardiograms.

If the infection is not too severe, we will administer a drug to kill the adult heartworms. Complete rest is essential to avoid serious complications.

With severe infections the treatment may be spread in several months or surgery may be required.

In addition to adult heartworms, there may be microfilariae (immature worms) in your pet's blood. We will treat these as well. Follow-up testing will be necessary to determine the effectiveness of the treatment.

Today more than 95% of the dogs with heartworm disease are treated successfully. Early detection and ongoing prevention are needed to prevent this very serious disease in your pet.



Call for an appointment today.  
303-828-0373

