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Examining Two Types of Heartworm

Morris Animal Foundation is currently funding research that looks at two different strains of heartworm, *Dirofilaria immitis* and *Angiostrongylus vasorum*. Below are some of the facts about symptoms and treatment.

Dirofilaria immitis

Location: Primarily the United States. Though heartworm is more common near the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, cases have been diagnosed in all 48 contiguous states and Hawaii.

Transmission: Mosquitoes

Prevalence: Up to 60% of dogs and 20% of cats in active areas

Clinical signs in dogs:

- Mild, persistent cough
- Reluctance to move or exercise
- Fatigue after only moderate exercise
- Reduced appetite
- Weight loss
- Can cause disease of the heart and lungs

Clinical signs in cats:

- Chronic vomiting
- Gagging
- Difficulty breathing or rapid breathing
- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Can cause severe and possibly fatal lung disease

Prevention: There are a variety of options for preventing heartworm infection in both dogs and cats, including daily and monthly tablets and chewables and monthly topicals.

Treatment: Dogs currently have only one approved drug treatment option, adulticide. Cats have no approved treatments for heartworm, but supportive therapies can help the cat to recover on its own.

For more information, go to www.heartwormsociety.org.

Angiostrongylus vasorum

Location: Europe, with hotspots in southern France, parts of Denmark and the United Kingdom. Also recently found in Canada and a few other European countries.

Transmission: slugs and snails

Prevalence: It is difficult to assess prevalence in dogs in endemic areas as there have been no proper epidemiological surveys.

Clinical signs in dogs:

- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- Exercise intolerance
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Can lead to congestive heart failure, respiratory insufficiency and blood clotting disorders

Treatment: No drugs that have been proven to prevent infection, and there is at present no test for infection in dogs that is sensitive and specific enough for effective use in practice.