



Heartworm Disease in Dogs: The Risk in Northern California



What is Heartworm Disease?

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal condition caused by parasitic worms (*Dirofilaria immitis*). These worms live in the heart, lungs, and blood vessels of infected dogs, causing damage to vital organs and reducing quality of life.

The disease is spread through **mosquito bites** — when an infected mosquito bites a dog, it transmits microscopic larvae that mature into adult heartworms.



Why It Matters in Northern California

While heartworm disease has traditionally been more common in warmer, humid regions of the U.S., cases have been **steadily increasing in Northern California**.

- Mosquito activity in our region extends from **spring through late fall** (and sometimes year-round in milder microclimates).
- Increased travel and relocation of dogs from high-risk areas contribute to local exposure.
- Even **indoor dogs are at risk** if mosquitoes enter the home.



This means **all dogs in Northern California are at risk** unless protected year-round.



Signs of Heartworm Disease

Early stages often show no symptoms. As the disease progresses, dogs may develop:

- Persistent cough
- Fatigue after mild activity
- Decreased appetite and weight loss
- Labored breathing
- Swollen belly (due to fluid buildup in severe cases)

☞ Unfortunately, by the time signs are noticeable, heartworm disease is often advanced and harder to treat.



Prevention is Key

The good news: **Heartworm disease is preventable.**

- **Monthly preventives** (oral tablets, topical treatments, or injections) protect dogs by killing heartworm larvae before they mature.
- Prevention is **safe, affordable, and highly effective.**
- Treatment for heartworm disease, once contracted, is costly, lengthy, and can be risky for the dog.



Testing and Protection at PVPC

At **Pleasant Valley Pet Clinic**, we recommend:

- **Annual heartworm testing** for all dogs — even those on preventives.
- **Year-round prevention** for every dog, regardless of lifestyle.
- **Customized recommendations** based on your pet's health and risk level.



Our Commitment

Heartworm disease is a real and growing risk in Northern California, but with consistent prevention, it's completely avoidable.

☎ Contact us today to schedule your dog's annual heartworm test and get them started (or renewed) on safe, effective prevention.