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**Feline Heartworm Disease**

**Do I need to worry about heartworm disease (HWD) in my cat? What if my cat is strictly indoors?** Although outdoor cats are at greater risk of being infected, studies have shown about 25% of cats infected with heartworm disease are indoor only which means **ALL** cat owners should learn the facts. Heartworm infection takes place when a mosquito carrying infective, microscopic-size heartworm larvae bites a cat for a blood meal. Heartworms are found in cats, dogs, and ferrets. They also occur in wild animals such as California sea lions, foxes, and wolves. They have rarely been found in people.

**What are the signs of Feline HWD? Should I give a preventative?**

Signs range from none to acute (sudden) death without any other previous signs. Cats can display vomiting intermittently (food or foam, usually unrelated to eating), lethargy, anorexia, weight loss, coughing, asthma-like signs (intermittent difficulty in breathing, panting, open-mouthed breathing), gagging, difficulty breathing, rapid breathing, blindness, and/or convulsions. Overall, heartworms actually cause more damage to the respiratory system than to the heart in cats which is why in cats, we now call the disease "Heartworm Associated Respiratory Disease" or "HARD".

The option to give a safe monthly preventative is your choice. Reasons to give the preventative can be summarized by the following:

* Sudden death may be the 1st and only symptom of HARD.
* Signs can be subtle and diagnosis can be difficult. There are limitations to the blood tests we have available and even with additional advanced testing, cases can be challenging to diagnose.
* Currently, there are no products in the U.S approved for the treatment of feline heartworm infection. We manage the disease with basic palliative support and in isolated cases elected surgery may be considered but overall, it is undoubtedly much easier to prevent the disease than it is to treat it.
* Monthly heartworm preventives have activity against intestinal parasites, which inadvertently infect three to six million people every year. These preventives protect pets and people on multiple levels.

We recommend the following monthly preventatives:

**Revolution** (topical – prevents against heartworms, fleas, ear mites hookworms, roundworms)

**Interceptor** (oral – prevents against heartworms, hookworms & roundworms)

**Heartguard** (oral – prevents against heartworms & hookworms)