

Global Warming May Affect Your Pet's Health

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Global Warming is affecting all of us and causing warmer winters and hotter summers. This is also having an effect on your pet's health. The warming of our planet is actually contributing to a lengthening of flea and heartworm season in our area .

Canine heartworms are spread by any one of more than 70 species of mosquitoes. As most people are aware, mosquitoes require warmth and humidity to survive and reproduce. Diseases that are considered to be "tropical" are often associated with mosquitoes. Recently though, these tropical diseases are showing up in less than tropical areas.

Although the Southeastern states have a much higher prevalence of Heartworm disease and parasites, Canada is also effective with the highest heartworm and parasite incidents found in Southwestern Ontario and Manitoba. Heartworms have also been found in cats in these areas. According to the American Heartworm Society, it appears that the incidence of canine heartworm disease has not diminished – and that has scientists and veterinarians frustrated.

The severe hurricane season of 2005, which some scientists have also blamed on the global warming trends, sent many dogs from the heartworm heavy southern states across the US into areas not normally associated with significant heartworm populations.

Further sections of the same survey showed that the majority of veterinarians surveyed recommend year round heartworm preventive for their patients and also recommended annual testing. With these types of recommendations, why is it that we continue to see so many cases of this potentially deadly disease?

The answer to this question is actually found in many parts. First dogs are not the only animals to be affected by heartworms. This disease has been found in coyotes, wild dogs, foxes, and even cats. Second, the reported quarter million dogs in the study represent only dogs who received veterinary care. Many dogs, both owned and stray, never receive the preventive care needed to stop the disease. Experts from the American Heartworm Society (www.heartwormsociety.org) have also stated that the travel habits of people and where they live has helped spread the disease.

But most concerning is information found in a compliance study done by the American Animal Hospital Association. In this study, it was found that less than 50% of pet owners comply with their veterinarian's recommendations for giving the monthly heartworm products that can prevent the disease. This has become such an issue that many of the veterinary pharmaceutical companies who produce the heartworm preventive medications now offer email reminders for clients.

Heartworm is not the only parasite to cause problems. Fleas and intestinal parasites are now found in Ontario from April through December. These parasites affect not only our pets but can cause human health issues as well. Intestinal parasites can cause disease in people especially children. Parasite prevention is the key to good health for your pet and your family. Further information about the importance of parasite prevention can be found on the Companion Animal Parasite Council's website, www.petsandparasites.com.

An annual blood test of your dog will help to determine whether or not he or she might have heartworms. Even if your pet is on a preventive year round, the yearly test offers confidence that the preventive works and that your pet has not decided to bury the pill in your backyard. Additionally, this visit to your veterinarian can help you provide the highest level of care for your pet and is a great time for a wellness check. Additional blood tests can provide insight into your pet's health and detect diseases before symptoms are present. Be sure to schedule your pet's annual spring visit!