

K.C. CAT CLINIC
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HEARTWORM DISEASE IN CATS

The incidence of heartworm disease in cats in the Kansas City area has been steadily increasing over the last several years. It is no longer considered a rare diagnosis. In a given area, the incidence of heartworm disease is thought to be 10 - 15% of the incidence of this disease in dogs. There is a lot of heartworm disease in dogs in Kansas City. Cats in our area are now considered at risk for this disease and we want to be sure that cat owners are aware of the preventative measures that they can take to protect their cats.

Mosquitoes transmit heartworms. Adult worms live in the heart. The worms cause lots of irritation in the major vessels near the heart. Unfortunately, in many cats the first sign of heartworm disease is sudden death from a pulmonary embolism. If we are lucky, a cat may have symptoms that will give us clues to look for the worms. Some of the signs associated with heartworms are vomiting, coughing, and difficulty breathing. Lots of other things can cause these signs as well, so we will be testing for them as well as the heartworms. If we determine that a cat has heartworms, treatment is started to decrease the irritation in the vessels. Even if they are being treated, a cat can still die from this terrible disease.

A monthly oral preventative medication is now available. It is called Heartguard™ and comes in a beef base chewable pellet. If it is likely that your cat will be exposed to mosquitoes, we suggest using this product. The product is packaged for weight ranges of 0 - 5 lb. and 5 - 15lb. If your cat weighs over 15 lb., you should mix and match the doses to get to the closest weight. For example, if your cat weighs 18 lb. use a small dose and a large one.

As time goes on more will be learned about control of this disease. We will keep you informed of advances in this area.