

## WITH SUMMER COMES HEARTWORM SEASON!

Each year as summer arrives heartworm season returns. The scientific name of the heartworm is *Dirofilaria immitis*. This is a thin worm that is usually 10 to 30 centimetres long. The adult worm lodges itself in the heart and in the large blood vessels which exit from the heart.

This infection, dirofilariosis, is transmittable by mosquitoes only. Each year, the adult worms living in a dog's heart produce larvae, or microfiliates, which circulate in the blood. When a mosquito bites an infected dog, it inhales several microfiliates along with the drop of blood. These larvae develop for approximately 15 days in the mosquito, after which time a mosquito that bites another dog will transmit the larvae. The larvae will inhabit the circulatory system of this new "host" and will eventually reach the heart.

As you might imagine, these worms prevent adequate blood circulation and create significant lesions on the heart. Therefore the signs of infection are similar to those of cardiac disease: fatigue, coughing, intolerance to exercise, weight loss, panting and even sudden death. A treatment exists for dogs which are infected or "positive" but it is expensive and can have significant secondary effects. It is because this sickness is so serious and at times mortal that we insist so strongly on its prevention!

Prevention is simple. It starts with a blood test to make sure that the dog is not already infected. The second stage is to give Fido one pill a month from June to November. You must give the pill regularly and be sure that Fido has absorbed the medication. Watch out for

diarrhea or vomiting and make sure your dog does not spit out the pill as soon as you turn your back! If you travel with your faithful friend outside of summer months to destinations where mosquitoes are still present, such as Florida or Mexico for example, make sure you think about prevention when preparing your trip.

Choosing a product depends on you and your veterinarian. Certain products can also prevent flea infestations, offer a treatment for intestinal worms or contribute to the treatment of internal parasites such as ear mites or scabies. Just as children, the elderly, persons undergoing chemotherapy or who are immunodeficient are more susceptible to zoonoses (diseases transmitted from an animal to a human), it is important to choose the medication which corresponds best with your animal's needs.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about this disease. At the LaSalle Veterinary Clinic preventative medicine is important to us and we will be pleased to answer your questions in order to ensure that your summer with your dog will be hassle free!