

HEARTWORM PREVENTION: WHAT'S NEW?

First we had daily heartworm prevention. Then came once a month heartworm pills. Now there is a new kid on the block: a 6 month injectable heartworm prevention. It gives dog owners another option in the fight against these dangerous parasites.

“How effective is it?” The research data that was done to get it approved for use in the United States shows 100% prevention against heartworms for a period of 6 months. Also, it has been used in other countries for several years before its introduction into our country and the reports of its effectiveness have been good.

“Can I put my new puppy on the injectable heartworm prevention?” No. A growing puppy will “outgrow” the dosage that you would give him. In other words, if you dose the puppy for the weight as a young puppy, he will grow so fast and become too big for the dosage you gave him. Also, it might be dangerous to dose him for the weight you think he might be in 6 months. Therefore, for at least the first 6 months of his life, you need to use the monthly pills for heartworm prevention.

“Is it safe?” Any drug that you inject or give orally to a dog has the potential for side effects. There have been infrequent severe reactions to any of the previous heartworm preventatives and there have been some with the injectable. Other than some pain and swelling at the injection site, the incidence of serious side effects has been very small. Probably less than 1 in 10,000 doses given. That is comparable to any other injection including routine vaccines.

“How will I remember to give this twice a year?” Most people will give one dose when they come in for their yearly checkup and vaccinations. You then only have to make one more trip in 6 months. Usually your vet will mail you a reminder and there is an online sign-up so that you can get an email when it is time for your dog's next injection.

“Should I switch my dog from monthly pills to the injection?” That is a question only you and your veterinarian can answer. Probably the only reason to switch is if it is more convenient for you. If you have trouble remembering to give the pills monthly, you may want to consider the injection. There does not appear to be any advantage other than convenience. In fact, the monthly pills are probably better at deworming the dog for intestinal parasites. For the most part however, intestinal parasites are an infrequent problem in adult dogs. Also, the most commonly seen intestinal parasite in adult dogs, the tapeworm, is not killed by the monthly heartworm pills (or any heartworm preventative for that matter).

It is not for everyone, but you may want to discuss this new option with your veterinarian.

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