

Increased Heartworm Risk To Pets This Year

Veterinarians are warning that recent flooding in the Midwest caused a rise in mosquito populations, which can put pets at risk for heartworm.

By Soraya Gutierrez

Posted: July 23, 2008, 6:45 p.m. EDT

A mosquito population explosion caused by recent Midwest flooding is a good reason for pets to be on heartworm medication this summer. Steve Thompson of Purdue University's School of Veterinary Medicine said mosquitoes are a potential danger to cats, dogs and ferrets because they are susceptible to heartworm infection.

If left untreated, heartworm can be fatal. Given the heavy rainfall throughout states such as Indiana in recent months, mosquito breeding is high, and could lead to more heartworm cases this year.

"The mosquito population burst we've had in the past few weeks has made it difficult," Thompson said. Pets that have not been tested in the past six months for heartworm should have one, he added.

"The good thing about heartworm prevention is that it literally works 45 days backwards. With any mosquito bite a cat or dog received during the past month, or even longer, the young worm can be killed in the skin before reaching the heart," he said.

Heartworm preventive medication can be administered orally, by a liquid treatment applied to the back of a pet's neck, or by a longer-acting injection. In dogs, heartworms more easily complete their whole life cycle and reach the heart, compared to cats, Thompson said.

In cats, heartworm can cause sudden lung problems and asthma-like coughing as larvae migrate through the lungs to the heart. Cats can appear healthy moments before a coughing attack. [For information about heartworm in ferrets, [click here](#)>> -- Eds.]

To inform pet owners about the latest information on emerging vector-borne disease, zoonotic potential and parasite control, a parasite education tour will visit 13 cities in 17 days, starting July 22 in New Orleans. Parasitologists from the Companion Animal Parasite Council are traveling the country this summer to meet with veterinarians, veterinary staff and human health professionals to offer continuing education on various parasite issues.

The CAPC has educational activities planned for pet owners during the tour at locations in Kansas City on July 25; Chicago, July 27; New York City, Aug. 2; Baltimore, Aug. 3 and Charleston, S.C., Aug. 6 and 7.

"The education tour will help us spread the word about these parasitic threats and the latest diagnostic and prevention protocols to most effectively manage them," said Dr. Michael Paul, CAPC executive director.