



HEART for Pugs: Heartworm Prevention Guide

Protecting Pugs Through Heartworm Education and Responsible Treatment

Heartworm disease is one of the most serious—and preventable—health threats facing dogs in Florida and Georgia. At Pug Rescue of Florida & Georgia, we see firsthand the impact heartworm disease can have on the dogs in our care. Through our **HEART for Pugs** program, we are committed to helping owners understand the importance of prevention, early detection, and responsible treatment.

HEART stands for Heartworm Education and Responsible Treatment.

What Is Heartworm Disease?

Heartworm disease is caused by a parasite called *Dirofilaria immitis*, which is spread through mosquito bites.

When an infected mosquito bites a dog, microscopic larvae enter the bloodstream and begin developing into adult heartworms. Over time, these worms migrate to the heart, lungs, and surrounding blood vessels.

Adult heartworms can grow up to 12 inches long and may live for several years inside a dog's body.

Without treatment, heartworm disease can cause:

- Damage to the heart and lungs
- Chronic coughing
- Exercise intolerance
- Weight loss
- Difficulty breathing
- Heart failure
- Death

Why Heartworm Prevention Matters

Heartworm disease is far easier—and less expensive—to prevent than it is to treat.

Monthly prevention:

- Is safe and highly effective
- Costs significantly less than treatment
- Helps protect your dog year-round
- Prevents long-term damage to the heart and lungs

Even dogs that spend most of their time indoors are at risk. Mosquitoes regularly enter homes, and a single infected mosquito can transmit heartworm disease.

In Florida and Georgia, where mosquitoes are active much of the year, veterinarians recommend **year-round heartworm prevention for all dogs.**

Common Myths About Heartworm Disease

"My dog stays indoors."

Indoor dogs are still at risk. Mosquitoes can easily enter homes through open doors, garages, screened porches, and other entry points.

"I only need prevention during the summer."

In the Southeast, mosquito activity can occur year-round. Consistent monthly prevention provides the best protection.

"Missing a month isn't a big deal."

Even a single missed dose can create a gap in protection. Prevention works best when given consistently every month.

"Heartworm treatment is easy."

Treatment is effective but can be lengthy, costly, and physically demanding for the dog. Prevention is always the better option whenever possible.

Signs of Heartworm Disease

Many infected dogs show few or no symptoms during the early stages.

As the disease progresses, signs may include:

- Persistent cough
- Reduced stamina
- Difficulty exercising
- Excessive panting
- Fatigue
- Weight loss
- Labored breathing

Severely affected dogs may develop:

- Swollen abdomen
- Collapse
- Signs of heart failure
- Life-threatening complications

Because symptoms often appear late in the disease process, annual testing remains important even for dogs on prevention.

Annual Testing Is Still Important

Heartworm prevention is extremely effective, but no preventive program is perfect.

Veterinarians recommend:

- Annual heartworm testing
- Year-round prevention
- Routine wellness examinations

Regular testing helps identify infections early, when treatment outcomes are typically better.

What Happens If a Dog Tests Positive?

A positive heartworm test does not mean a dog has no future.

Many heartworm-positive dogs go on to live happy, healthy lives after treatment.

Treatment generally involves:

1. Confirming the diagnosis
2. Additional testing to evaluate disease severity
3. Restricting exercise
4. Administering medications to eliminate heartworms
5. Monitoring recovery

Because every case is different, your veterinarian will determine the most appropriate treatment plan.

Exercise Restriction During Treatment

One of the most important aspects of heartworm treatment is limiting activity.

As heartworms die, fragments can travel through the lungs and blood vessels. Excessive exercise increases the risk of complications.

During treatment, dogs may need:

- Leash walks only
- No running or rough play
- Limited excitement
- Careful supervision

While this can be challenging, temporary activity restriction greatly improves safety during recovery.

Special Considerations for Rescue Dogs

Many rescue dogs arrive with unknown medical histories and inconsistent preventive care.

Some may:

- Have never received heartworm prevention
- Have missed doses
- Test positive despite appearing healthy
- Require treatment before adoption

At Pug Rescue of Florida & Georgia, every dog receives heartworm screening and appropriate medical care based on veterinary recommendations.

How You Can Protect Your Pug

Make Prevention a Routine

Choose a specific day each month and set reminders to administer prevention consistently.

Keep Veterinary Appointments

Annual exams and testing help ensure your dog remains protected.

Never Skip Doses

If you miss a dose, contact your veterinarian for guidance.

Ask Questions

Your veterinarian can help determine the best preventive option for your dog's age, health, and lifestyle.

The HEART for Pugs Promise

Heartworm disease is preventable, and education saves lives.

Through **HEART for Pugs**, Pug Rescue of Florida & Georgia is committed to:

- Educating owners about heartworm disease
- Promoting year-round prevention
- Supporting responsible treatment decisions
- Helping heartworm-positive dogs receive the care they need
- Giving affected pugs a second chance at a healthy future

Together, we can reduce the impact of heartworm disease and help more pugs live long, happy lives.

 **Protect. Prevent. Educate. Treat.**

HEART for Pugs — Heartworm Education and Responsible Treatment