



# Association of Shelter Veterinarians

## Heartworm Management

*Last reviewed: October 2018*

The ASV supports the application of the American Heartworm Society guidelines for the prevention, diagnosis, and management of canine and feline heartworms.<sup>1,2</sup> The ASV also acknowledges that every shelter may not always be able to meet these practices. Resource allocation, capacity for care, compromised welfare brought on by prolonged shelter stays, and risks to population health may warrant alternative approaches to heartworm management.

Regardless of geographic location, sheltering organizations are urged to maintain all dogs, cats, and ferrets on heartworm preventive medications year-round in order to protect individual animal health and welfare and limit disease transmission within the shelter and community. The ASV encourages sheltering organizations to perform screening tests on at-risk dogs. The ASV also encourages all sheltering organizations to institute therapy for infected dogs to reduce pathology and infective potential. Alternatives to maintenance of infected dogs within the shelter population, such as transfer to partnering agencies with the capacity to begin treatment, are strongly recommended.\*

Organizations choosing to treat and/or adopt infected dogs should ensure that:

- their resources and mission allow for the humane care of exercise-restricted dogs with extended lengths of stay,
- the heartworm management protocol employed minimizes risk of transmission to other animals in the shelter and the community,
- the heartworm management protocol is initiated in a timely manner to limit the potential for further transmission in the shelter and the community,
- resources diverted toward heartworm management do not compromise care of other shelter animals,
- shelter staff, volunteers, and adopters are educated on the importance of adhering to each component of the management protocol, and
- potential adopters are informed of the specific management protocol undertaken and are encouraged to consult with their veterinarian for further guidance.

\*When transporting heartworm-positive dogs, shelters should reference published recommendations for Minimizing Heartworm Transmission in Relocated Dogs.<sup>3</sup>

### References

1. American Heartworm Society. Current Canine Guidelines for the Prevention, Diagnosis, and Management of Heartworm Infection in Dogs. Revised 2018. Available online at: <https://heartwormsociety.org/images/pdf/2018-AHS-Canine-Guidelines.pdf>
2. American Heartworm Society. Current Feline Guidelines for the Prevention, Diagnosis, and Management of Heartworm Infection in Cats. Revised 2014. Available online at: <https://heartwormsociety.org/images/pdf/2014-AHS-Feline-Guidelines.pdf>
3. American Heartworm Society and Association of Shelter Veterinarians. Minimizing Heartworm Transmission in Relocated Dogs. Available online at: [https://www.heartwormsociety.org/images/A-News/SKO\\_Transport\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Web\\_E.pdf](https://www.heartwormsociety.org/images/A-News/SKO_Transport_Guidelines_for_Web_E.pdf)