



Rescue Dog Heartworm Treatment Options

PALISADES VETERINARY CLINIC

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The American Heartworm Society recommends the following (<http://www.heartwormsociety.org/veterinary-resources/canine-guidelines-summary.html>) as standard of care for heartworm treatment in dogs to maximize safety and efficacy of treatment:

1. A 3-injection protocol using Immiticide (1 injection, wait 1 month, and then final 2 injections given 24 hrs apart)
2. Begin exercise restriction as soon as diagnosed heartworm positive.
3. Pre-treat with heartworm preventative once monthly for 2 months, and with Doxycycline for 1 month beginning 60 days, prior to any Immiticide treatments. This reduces the risk of pathology associated with the dying of heartworms, as well as "Wolbachia syndrome."
4. Stricter exercise restrictions after first injection and for 6-8 weeks after final 2 injections.
5. Oral prednisone on a tapering dose after each injection to reduce inflammation.
6. Staging with CBC and chest x-ray and provide nursing care if symptomatic or reaction.

Pre-treatment Examination, Veterinary Consultation, Pre-treatment medications (done 1 to 2 months prior to any treatment injections)

- Pre-treatment examination of your new dog, during a 1 hour office visit to consult with veterinarian about testing, treatment, risks, post-treatment reactions, medications, and other concerns you may have. **Cost \$85.**

Pre-Treatment Diagnostics

- Chest x-ray screens for heart disease and lung damage caused by the heartworms. **Cost \$175.**
- CBC (Complete blood count) to look for anemia (low red blood cells) associated with more severe stages of heartworm disease. **Cost \$85**

You may discuss the potential benefits of these tests with the veterinarian at an examination visit prior to treatment visits. Some healthy dogs do not necessarily need these tests. Sick, coughing,

thin dogs would be candidates for these tests, and sometimes seemingly healthy dogs have heart and lung damage that a chest x-ray reveals.

Standard 2-shot Protocol (PREVIOUS standard of care)

- 2 injections of Immiticide, 24 hours apart
- About **90% effective** (10% of dogs will still be heartworm positive at their 4-month post-treatment test, and will require a second 2-shot protocol treatment (cost of \$400-\$700, depending on size of dog)
- Prednisone, Tramadol, and Doxycycline medications recommended for post-care pain and inflammation prevention (**cost \$45-60**)
- Faster initial kill of heartworms, so potentially higher risk for post-treatment reaction to dying worms and/or thromboembolic event as worms die off
- **The rescue covers the entire cost of these shots. They do not pay for any post-treatment medications for pain and inflammation, and we will supply these for humane reasons. See the cost, listed above.**

Three-injection Protocol (American Heartworm Association recommended)

- 1 injection of Immiticide, wait 1 month, then 2 injections (24 hours apart)
- About 99% effective (1% of dogs still heartworm positive at post-treatment test 4 months later, and will require second 2-shot protocol treatment, cost above)
- **Additional cost for extra injection (rescue will cover 2 injection protocol) of \$150 - \$200, depending on size of dog. The veterinarian will notify you of cost prior to proceeding.**

Medications supplied for your dog to take following treatment, regardless of protocol chosen:

1. Doxycycline – antibiotic. Taken twice daily with food. Can cause stomach upset, especially on empty stomach. Used to eliminate Wolbachia syndrome (reaction of the dog's body to exposure to Wolbachia, a parasite within the heartworm).
2. Prednisone – anti-inflammatory. Always to be given with food.
3. Tramadol – Pain reliever. May cause mild sedation or stomach upset. This medication helps with the pain caused by the intramuscular injections of the heartworm treatment (which can cause soreness, lameness, and pain, sometimes severe).
 - **Total average cost for all 3 medications is \$45-\$60, but varies depending on the weight of the dog.**