

BE YOUR PET'S BEST FRIEND!

Last month I wrote about the impending mating season and begged everyone to get their animals spayed/neutered before this annual calamity of unwanted kittens and puppies begins and the shelters, rescues and foster families work so hard to ensure that these precious little creatures receive the care they need and are ultimately adopted by people that will love them and care for them for a lifetime.

Most of us look forward to the warmer weather and sunshine of spring time. We can spend more time outdoors and return to many activities that get put aside for the winter months such as sunbathing, water skiing, visiting the ocean and even walking/running and other forms of outdoor activity that sometimes are stopped during the colder months. Who doesn't love an outdoor barbecue in the backyard or at one of our great parks as the days get warmer and longer. A fun run or walk with your dog through Empire Mines or another trail can be inviting for you and your dog.

This is a time when we especially need to safeguard our pets. Mosquitoes are the carriers of heartworm disease. Both dogs and cats can become infected with this dreaded parasite by being bitten by a mosquito who is carrying the parasite. The best insurance against this horrible situation is to ensure your dogs and even your cats are on heartworm prevention. You can buy this from your veterinarian, on line with a prescription or at VIP at Incredible Pets every Saturday from 4 to 5:30.

Heartworm disease is a serious disease that results in severe lung disease, heart failure, other organ damage, and death in pets, mainly dogs. It is caused by a parasitic worm called *Dirofilaria immitis*. The worms are spread through the bite of a mosquito. The dog is the host meaning that the worms mature into adults, mate, and produce offspring while living inside a dog. The worms are called "heartworms" because the adults live in the heart, lungs, and associated blood vessels of an infected animal. This disease can be treated by a veterinarian. The treatment is expensive and your dog's health becomes severely compromised as the build up of the heartworms progresses. There is no treatment for cats at this time, so please provide them with heartworm prevention, especially if you have an outdoor cat.

Keep your dog on heartworm prevention year around and have them tested every two years if you have had them consistently on prevention; if not have them tested immediately to ensure they do not have this dreaded parasite. Dying from heartworms is a cruel and painful way to die and so unnecessary with proper preventative care. Nevada County is an area that has a high density of mosquitoes that transmit this parasite, especially to dogs.

Ticks are also prevalent as the weather gets warmer. You can keep these nasty creatures off your pet by using flea and tick prevention medications. These can be purchased from your veterinarian. Ask which one (s)he recommends. Thousands of dogs are infected annually with dangerous tick-transmitted diseases. Ticks are parasites that attach themselves to dogs, feed on blood and transmit diseases directly into the dog's system. Major tick-borne diseases transmitted to dogs in the United States include: Lyme disease can cause stiffness, lameness, swollen joints, loss of appetite, fever and fatigue. Canine Ehrlichiosis can cause fever, loss of appetite, depression, weight loss, runny eyes and nose, nose bleeds and swollen limbs. Canine Anaplasmosis can cause fever, loss of appetite, stiff joints and lethargy, but also can include vomiting, diarrhea and in extreme cases, dogs may suffer seizures. These diseases may not show up for months after your pet has been bitten.

Fleas are also prevalent and busy reproducing during the warm spring weather. Flea bites can be miserable and itch so bad your pet will scratch and bite it's skin until it becomes sore and infected. If you've ever had a flea bite you know how bad it can itch. Tick and flea prevention is your best option.

Last but not least- it's foxtail season. These nasty weeds have barbs on them, like barbed wire, and once they enter your pet's ear, nose, throat it is nearly impossible to remove them without taking your pet to the veterinarian. Foxtails will cause immense shaking of the dog's head if it is in his/her ear and continuous sneezing if it is in the dog's nose. Foxtails can also get lodged in between your pets toes and burrow their way in through the skin. The best preventative is to keep your pet out of areas where these horrid things grow.

Please enjoy and protect your pet. Anytime you feel your pet has been exposed to any of these parasites or fox tails check their body and take appropriate action, which may include a trip to a veterinarian. You owe it to your pet to be their best friend and protector.

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