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Contacts:

Leanne Breiby
leanneb@germinder.com
816-822-0192
913-205-9949

Lea-Ann Germinder, APR
lgerminder@germinder.com
816-213-8238
917-334-8682

THE SECRET IS OUT ON FELINE HEARTWORM DISEASE

New Studies Call for Prevention & Redefinition of Heartworm Disease in Cats

BATAVIA, Ill., March 1, 2007 – One mosquito bite can infect a cat with heartworm, a potentially destructive and insidious disease, which reveals itself as H.A.R.D. (Heartworm Associated Respiratory Disease). The American Heartworm Society (AHS) and the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) are teaming up to get this urgent message out to cat owners through the **KNOW Heartworms** campaign, including the Web site, www.knowheartworms.org.

The campaign outlines five myths, or misunderstandings, about feline heartworm disease: Dogs vs. Cats, Indoor vs. Outdoor Cats, It's a Heart Disease, Adult Heartworms vs. Larvae and Diagnosis. All of these issues are misunderstood to the detriment of cats' health.

Ashley Jones, a resident physician in Columbia, S.C., came home one day to find her one-and-a-half-year-old, indoor cat Harley lying motionless on the floor. After rushing her to the vet for examination, the doctors determined that Harley had died from heartworm disease.

"My husband and I felt helpless, and wished there was something we could have done to prevent [Harley's death]," Ashley said. "We now protect our other cat against heartworms and are proud to raise awareness so that other cat lovers do not have to experience such a tragic event."

According to Dr. Charles Thomas Nelson, president of the American Heartworm Society, both the veterinary community and the cat-owning public have a long way to go in developing awareness about the risks of feline heartworm disease. Studies indicate that less than 5 percent of U.S. households with cats regularly administer heartworm prevention. In contrast, 59 percent of dog-owning households regularly use a heartworm prevention product.

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The dangers associated with heartworms are much more significant than previously thought. The AAFP wants everyone to be aware of the range of risks a cat can face and make sure the animal receives regular checkups.

Diagnosing heartworm can be difficult even for experts because symptoms are similar to those of feline asthma or allergic bronchitis.

13 Signs Associated with H.A.R.D. (Heartworm Associated Respiratory Disease):

Anorexia	Fainting
Blindness	Lethargy
Collapse	Rapid Heart Rate
Convulsions	Sudden Death
Coughing	Vomiting
Diarrhea	Weight Loss
Difficulty Breathing	

The American Heartworm Society maintains updated guidelines on its host site **www.heartwormsociety.org** with the latest research to help veterinarians more effectively educate pet owners and manage heartworm disease. The “Guidelines for the Diagnosis, Prevention and Management of Heartworm Infection in Cats” is updated on an ongoing basis. Highlights include revised information on the pathophysiology of feline heartworm disease, interpretation of serology test results and continued support of the recommendation for year-round prevention.

“This is a very preventable disease,” says Nelson. “This education program and the updated guidelines are based upon the latest, ongoing research conducted around the world,” he adds.

Most veterinarians recommend year-round heartworm prevention in dogs, even in seasonal areas. One reason for this is compliance – making sure the medicine has been given properly by the pet owner. Surveys show that probably only 75 percent of the doses that are prescribed are given. But, even if doses are accidentally skipped, by giving preventives year-round the retroactive efficacy is increased, and it’s possible to actually stop some worms from developing into adults. Also, several of the monthly heartworm preventives have activity against some intestinal parasites, which infect 3 to 6 million people every year.

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For more information, contact Leanne Breiby at 816-822-0192.

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About the AHS:

Founded during the Heartworm Symposium of 1974, The American Heartworm Society was formed to facilitate and encourage the generation and dissemination of information about heartworm disease and encourages adoption of standardized procedures for its diagnosis, treatment and prevention. The American Heartworm Society stimulates and financially supports research, which furthers knowledge and understanding of the disease. Its headquarters are located in Batavia, Ill. For more information, visit www.heartwormsociety.org.

About the AAFP:

The American Association of Feline Practitioners is a professional organization of veterinarians dedicated to feline health care. The association supports professional growth and fellowship by providing outstanding continuing education, and by promoting and sponsoring research and outreach programs intended to improve the health and well-being of cats. Included in its mission is to improve the public stature of cats and to increase the knowledge of veterinarians in the field of feline medicine and surgery. For more information, visit www.aafponline.org.

About Pfizer Animal Health:

Pfizer Animal Health, a division of Pfizer Inc, is a world leader in animal health, committed to providing innovative medicines and vaccines for companion animals and livestock. Pfizer Inc discovers, develops, manufactures and markets leading prescription medicines for humans and animals. For additional information on Pfizer, visit www.pfizerah.com.

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