

Ya Gotta Have Heart!

By Lynne Corn

Everybeardie in our area is taking something to prevent heartworm – a parasite that attacks the heart of the dog, and is frequently fatal. It is transmitted by mosquitoes, so all dogs are at risk. Most of us give our dogs a monthly heartworm pill to prevent the disease. The most common ones, I think, are milbemycin, found in Interceptor, and ivermectin, found in Heartguard.

No, No, Novartis. Unfortunately, Interceptor is produced at only one plant; it is owned by Novartis—and the plant is closed due to cross-contamination. There is hope that it will open soon, but then they have been saying that for several months. So—switch to ivermectin? Not so fast. Seems that dogs of many herding breeds (plus a few others) carry a mutant gene called MDR1. It makes the dog very sensitive to ivermectin, and to a few other drugs as well. However, if the dog doesn't have this gene, then it is no more sensitive than any other dog, and can take ivermectin.

Swab the Dogs. How can you know if your dog has this gene? There is a test, developed at the vet school at Washington State University in Pullman, WA. You can order the kit for the cheek swab (the kit is free), and you pay your bill when you send in the sample (\$75/dog for 1-4 dogs; \$60/dog for 5 or more dogs if all samples are sent in one package and all replies are to the same address.) This test is fairly new, and is available only at WSU. You can order the kit at <http://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-vcpl/>. I got my kit in 2 days.