



Exercise caution when adopting a dog from a hurricane region

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MADISON – As images of dogs left behind during Hurricane Harvey permeate social media and news stories are written about rescue organizations bringing dogs from Texas, animal health officials are recommending that adoptive families exercise caution.

“Certain mosquito-borne diseases, heartworm in particular, are prevalent in the southeastern United States, so when a dog is brought to Wisconsin it is possible that it has heartworm,” says Dr. Yvonne Bellay, humane program veterinarian with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection—Division of Animal Health.

If you are planning to adopt a dog brought from the hurricane region, here are some things you should consider:

- If you have dogs or cats already in your home, they are at risk of contracting heartworm disease from the new dog.
- The dog should be tested for heartworm infection as soon as possible, which can usually be done during a routine visit.
- If found to be positive, be prepared to face treatment costs between \$400 and \$1,000 on average, according to the American Animal Hospital Association. Treatment involves injections and possible hospitalization.
- The seller must provide you with a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) issued within the 30 days prior to adopting the dog. The CVI provides documentation of the dog’s health at a particular point in time, but is not a guarantee of the animal’s health.

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease caused by foot-long worms that live in the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels of affected pets. It can lead to severe lung disease, heart failure and damage to other organs in the body. Heartworm disease affects dogs, cats and ferrets, as well as wild animals such as foxes, wolves, and coyotes.

“Dogs are natural hosts for heartworms and, if left untreated, the worms can cause lasting damage to the heart, lungs and arteries, affecting the dog’s health and quality of life,” Bellay says. Cats are atypical hosts for heartworms, but can still suffer damage in the form of a condition known as heartworm associated respiratory disease (HARD).

Prevention is by far the best option, and treatment—when needed—should be administered as early in the course of the disease as possible. Since many of these dogs are being picked up off the streets or removed from flooded homes, it is impossible to know whether they have been treated with heartworm preventive medication.

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