



### MEET THE AUTHOR

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The **Heartworm Hotline** column is presented in partnership between Today's Veterinary Nurse and the **American Heartworm Society** ([heartwormsociety.org](http://heartwormsociety.org)). The goal of the column is to communicate practical and timely information on prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of heartworm disease, as well as highlight current topics related to heartworm research and findings in veterinary medicine.

## Have Dog, Will Travel

**N**o question: dogs are on the move. Whether it's a homeless dog being relocated following a major hurricane event, a canine companion accompanying his owner on vacation or a show dog traveling for competition or exhibition, road trips can be life-enhancing—or even lifesaving—for dogs.

Nevertheless, travel is not without risk for dogs, and chief among these risks is the spread of infectious diseases. For diseases such as canine heartworm, the risk may be heightened when traveling through or from geographic areas with warm, humid climates or water sources where mosquito populations thrive. Meanwhile, mosquitoes feeding on a microfilaria-positive dog that was rescued or moved from one region to another can quickly become heartworm vectors for other unprotected dogs.

To help veterinary professionals protect the health of their patients and their pet communities, the American Heartworm Society (AHS) and the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) have formulated evidence-based best practices for minimizing transmission of heartworms in relocated dogs (FIGURE 1). These recommendations are applicable regardless of heartworm status and can serve as a foundation for client conversations on basic preventive health care.

The best practices include the following steps:

- **Testing of all dogs 6 months of age or older prior to relocation** to determine heartworm status.
- **Relocation delay for heartworm- and microfilaria-positive dogs** to prevent heartworm transmission.
- **Pre-treatment** (eg, administration of macrocyclic lactone drugs, application of an EPA-approved product that kills and repels mosquitoes, and antibiotics effective against *Wolbachia* (eg, doxycycline) **for heartworm-positive dogs** when relocation cannot be delayed.
- **Guidelines for microfilaria testing and retesting** to avoid the transport of microfilaricemic dogs.
- **Guidelines for transport following melarsomine administration** to minimize thromboembolic events.

When counseling clients about travel (BOX 1), the role of veterinary technicians is to ensure our clients understand the pros and cons of animal transportation and relocation, as well as their own

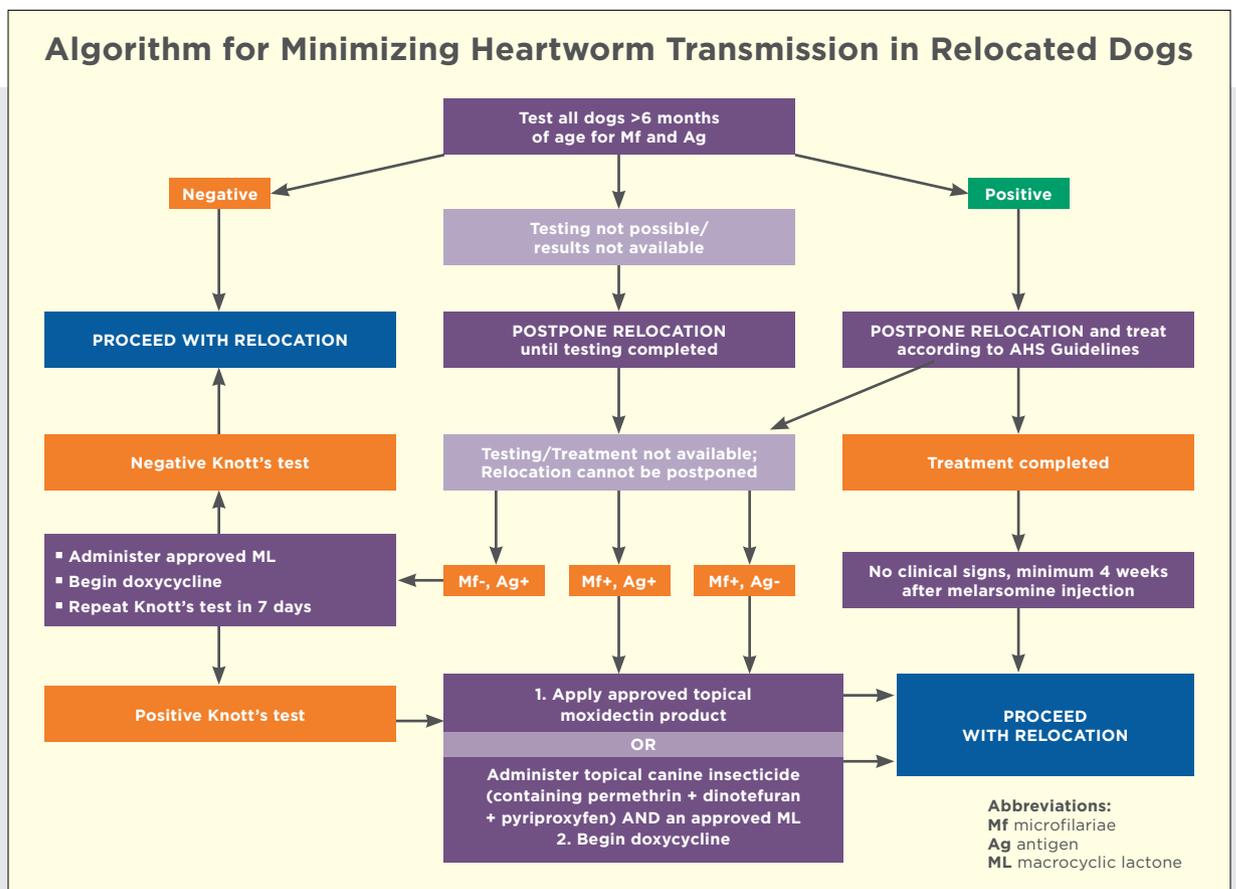


FIGURE 1. Algorithm for minimizing heartworm transmission in relocated dogs.

responsibilities to protect their pets from heartworm and other infectious diseases. For scenarios on how to communicate effectively with clients review scenarios under “Communicating with Owners.” Full details on the new best practices and references can be found at [heartwormsociety.org](http://heartwormsociety.org) and at [sheltervet.org](http://sheltervet.org). **TVN**

## BOX 1

### 5 Tips for “Talking Transportation”

- 1 Know the regulations.** It is important to research the regulations adopted by the destination state regarding importation of animals. The USDA/APHIS have some helpful links on their website to assist with locating this important information.<sup>1</sup>
- 2 Ensure preventive care measures are current.** Health certificates and copies of medical records are an important part of transporting pets. Once the requirements for the destination shelter are researched compare them to the vaccination history and be sure there are no additional medical requirements (Lyme, Leptospirosis, etc.).
- 3 Discuss ways to reduce stress during transport.** Maintaining stability of the animal's environment will help reduce their stress during transport. A familiar bed or towel, a favorite toy, food they are accustomed to and a soothing environment with music can all assist in stress reduction.
- 4 Counsel shelter and rescue groups.** Mainstream best practice guidelines are readily available. Veterinary Technicians who have not worked in animal sheltering can familiarize themselves with these guidelines by downloading the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators “Companion Animal Transport Best Practices.”<sup>2</sup>
- 5 Provide written materials to ensure comprehension of recommendations.** Whether you use recommended materials available online or you develop your own in-house materials, having a reference for clients to use will help ensure that your communication is clear and accessible.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/importexport/animal-import-and-export>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.sawanetwork.org/page/Bestpractice>

## Communicating with Owners

The following scenarios provide tips on communicating with owners about travel and heartworm risk.

### Scenario 1

Mrs. Smith wants to adopt a dog rescued following Hurricane Harvey in Houston, but has been told by the local shelter that the dog is heartworm-positive and needs treatment. She is uncertain about the next steps and is also concerned about risks to her current pets.

#### Talking Points

- Explain the costs and principles of antibiotic and adulticide treatment
  - Will Mrs. Smith be able to administer a full course of antibiotics?
  - Is she willing to bring the dog to the veterinary office for multiple treatments?
  - Does she understand and is she willing to pay for the medication and veterinary costs?
- Explain the importance of avoiding exertion during treatment
  - Does Mrs. Smith understand what keeping her new dog “quiet” will mean?
  - Does she have time to provide her new dog with needed attention and environmental enrichment while he or she is undergoing treatment?
- Explain follow-up
  - Is she willing to bring the dog in for follow-up testing?
  - Does she understand the need for ongoing, year-round heartworm prevention for all of her pets?

### Scenario 2

Mr. Jones recently retired and is planning to spend the upcoming winter in Florida, taking his beloved Dachshund, Roscoe, with him. He mentions these plans when he is in the clinic for Roscoe's annual check-up in September.

#### Talking Points

- Test if needed
  - Has Roscoe been tested for heartworm antigen and microfilaria within the last 12 months?
  - Has there been a change or lapse in preventive or a potential exposure that would necessitate a different testing protocol?
- Ensure ongoing prevention
  - Does Mr. Jones understand the importance of on-time administration of Roscoe's heartworm preventive?
  - Does he have enough heartworm medication to last through his stay?
  - Will he consider including a topical insecticide labelled to kill and repel mosquitoes in Roscoe's preventive care plan?
  - Is Mr. Jones willing to eliminate standing water and apply pet-safe environmental insecticides, to reduce Roscoe's exposure to mosquitoes?