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### Heart Disease

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W.H.W.T.C.A. Health Committee

**Description:** A Congenital heart defect is an abnormality that is present at birth, while an acquired heart disease is an abnormality that develops after birth.

**Clinical Signs:** Although many dogs show no outward signs of heart disease, others may exhibit weakness, exercise intolerance, coughing, labored breathing, poor growth, collapse or display a blue tinge to the mucous membranes of the mouth.

**Diagnosis:** The presence of cardiac disease or congenital heart defects frequently can remain undetected until a veterinary exam is performed. Puppies should be examined at six weeks of age and periodically thereafter in conjunction with their vaccine schedule. Congenital heart defects are most commonly discovered by listening for a heart murmur. Heart murmurs are classified by loudness, location and timing in the cardiac cycle. Puppies can have a murmur known as an innocent or flow murmur, which is not loud and is resolved spontaneously as the puppy grows, disappearing by 4-6 months of age. If physical examination suggests a cardiac abnormality, tests such as an electrocardiogram and radiographs usually are performed to assess the severity of the disease. A yearly check-up is also strongly recommended for all dogs, with very careful monitoring of the geriatric dog.

**Treatment:** Treatments vary according to the disease. Some are treated with medication, others with surgical intervention or a pacemaker.

**Mode of Inheritance:** Congenital heart defects may be inherited or may develop during gestation for unknown reasons or after exposure to toxins.

**\*\*\*Disclaimer\*\*\***

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