

## Help! My Puppy/Kitten Has A Heart Murmur!

When you take your pet to see the vet, they will perform a physical examination. This includes listening to their heart using a stethoscope. The vet does this so that they can listen for "abnormal sounds" or heart murmurs.

### What is a Heart Murmur?

A heart murmur is the name we give to an abnormal sound when we listen to your pet's chest. They have lots of different descriptions like "quiet" and "loud" and sometimes we will give them a number (grade) out of 6. A very loud murmur does not necessarily mean severe disease, similarly a soft murmur may not mean milder disease. Murmurs are individual to each and every animal. Murmurs don't always mean something is wrong, but they do usually need investigating to check everything is OK.

#### Diseases of the heart valves

The valves in the heart are responsible for making sure blood is pumped in the correct direction (forwards), if these valves are not working properly, blood can escape backwards resulting in an abnormal sound, or murmur.



#### Congenital heart defects

A congenital defect is something an animal is born with. They include Ventricular Septal Defects (VSD) - a 'hole in the heart' and Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA). Most congenital defects cause heart murmurs and are often picked up in puppies and kittens.

## What causes a heart murmur?

#### Narrowing of blood vessels

If valves or vessels have become narrowed, blood is pushed through a much smaller space, so at a greater pressure which results in a murmur.

#### Innocent murmurs

Some young animals, generally under the age of six months, can have harmless murmurs - what we term an "innocent murmur". These murmurs occur due to fast flowing blood through a small heart which eventually disappears when the animal ages and grows.

#### The vet said my puppy/kitten has a murmur, should I see a cardiologist?

The simple answer is, yes! It can be very difficult for your vet to tell you **why** your pet has a murmur through listening to their heart alone. They may want to refer you to see a heart specialist (cardiologist) for further examination.

#### What can I expect when I see the cardiologist?

Firstly, the cardiologist will want to take detailed information from you about your pet as well as performing a thorough examination. They will then recommend further testing using a variety of non-invasive techniques, depending on what they feel is necessary: these include echocardiography (heart scan), ECG, x-rays and blood tests.

We know that it can be worrying to find out that your puppy or kitten has a heart murmur. However, here at HeartVets we understand how important your pet is to you. We have a number of highly experienced cardiologists, nurses and administrative staff that will ensure your pet is comfortable with us, and will provide you with the information and support you need.



**If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.**