



COVID-19: FAQs FOR PET OWNERS

Updated as of 10:00 PM March 14, 2020

Below are answers to some questions we have received about [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#), which is caused by SARS-CoV-2. The AVMA has additional information and resources available on at avma.org/coronavirus. This is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be updated as it becomes available.

Q: Hong Kong’s Agriculture, Fisheries, and Conservation Department (AFCD) has indicated that a pet dog whose owner had contracted COVID-19 had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 and that multiple tests over several days’ time had come back “weak positive.” Do you have more information and should we be worried for our pets or for ourselves?

A: The ACFD first collected samples from the pet dog, reportedly a 17-year-old Pomeranian, on February 26 and detected low levels of SARS-CoV-2 material in samples from its nasal and oral cavities on February 27, using a real time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT PCR) test. The RT PCR test is sensitive, specific, and does not cross-react with other coronaviruses of dogs and cats. The ACFD repeated the test on February 28, March 2, and March 5 with continued “weak positive” results (nasal and oral sample, nasal sample, nasal sample, respectively). “Weak positive” suggests a small quantity of SARS-CoV-2 RNA in the samples. It doesn’t distinguish whether the samples contain intact viruses, which are infectious, or only fragments of the RNA. To better understand what this finding means, additional testing has been, and continues to be, conducted.

Part of that testing is serology to see if the dog is mounting an immune response to the virus. An acute phase sample was negative, indicating there are currently not measurable amounts of antibodies to the virus in the dog’s blood. This does not mean the dog is not infected with the virus, because it is not uncommon to have a negative result in earlier stages of infection. It can take 14 days or more for measurable levels of antibodies to be detected. Hong Kong officials advised that a second “convalescent” phase sample will be obtained later for further testing. In addition, gene sequencing of the SARS-CoV-2 virus from the dog and its close human contacts has been done and the viral sequences are very similar.

Experts from the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong and the College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences of the City University of Hong Kong believe the consistency and persistence of the results suggest the virus may have spread from the infected people to the dog in this particular case. Follow-up serology is pending.

Testing has been conducted by the laboratories of the AFCD and the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong. The latter is an accredited reference laboratory for the WHO for the testing of SARS-CoV-2.

This pet dog is one of two pet dogs under quarantine in separate rooms in a facility at the Hong Kong Port of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge; the second pet dog has had negative results of tests for the virus. The pet dogs are being cared for and neither has shown any signs of being ill with COVID-19.

In other testing, IDEXX [announced on March 13](#) that it had evaluated thousands of canine and feline specimens during validation of its new veterinary test system for the COVID-19 virus and had obtained no positive results. The specimens used for test development and validation were obtained from specimens submitted to IDEXX Reference Laboratories for PCR testing.

Considering this information in total, infectious disease experts and multiple international and domestic human and animal health organizations agree there is no evidence at this point to indicate that pets can spread COVID-19 to other animals, including people.

Q: Can SARS-CoV-2 infect pets and can it be spread by pets to other animals, including people?

A: We do not have a clear answer as to whether SARS-CoV-2 can infect pets at this time. That said, currently, there is no evidence that pets become sick. Infectious disease experts, as well as the CDC, OIE, and WHO indicate there is also no evidence to suggest that pet dogs or cats can be a source of infection with SARS-CoV-2, including spreading COVID-19 to people. More investigation is underway and, as we learn more, we will update you.

However, because animals can spread other diseases to people and people can also spread diseases to animals, it's a good idea to always wash your hands before and after interacting with animals.

Q: Can pets serve as fomites in the spread of COVID-19?

A: COVID-19 is usually primarily transmitted when there is contact with an infected person's bodily secretions, such as saliva or mucus droplets in a cough or sneeze.

COVID-19 might be able to be transmitted by touching a contaminated surface or object (i.e., a fomite) and then touching the mouth, nose, or possibly eyes, but this appears to be a secondary route. Smooth (non-porous) surfaces (e.g., countertops, door knobs) transmit viruses better than porous materials (e.g., paper money, pet fur), because porous, and especially fibrous, materials absorb and trap the pathogen (virus), making it harder to contract through simple touch.

Because your pet's hair is porous and also fibrous, it is very unlikely that you would contract COVID-19 by petting or playing with your pet. However, because animals can spread other diseases to people and people can also spread diseases to animals, it's always a good idea to wash your hands before and after interacting with animals; ensure your pet is kept well-groomed; and regularly clean your pet's food and water bowls, bedding material, and toys.

Q: If I am ill with COVID-19 are there special precautions I should take to prevent spreading disease, including when caring for my pet?

A: If you are sick with COVID-19 you need to be careful to avoid transmitting it to other people. Applying some common-sense measures can help prevent that from happening. Stay at home except to get medical care and call ahead before visiting your doctor. Minimize your contact with other people, including separating yourself from other members of your household who are not ill; using a different bathroom, if available; and wearing a facemask when you are around other people or pets and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. Wash your hands often, especially before touching your face, and use hand sanitizer. Use a tissue if you need to cough or sneeze and dispose of that tissue in the trash. When coughing or sneezing, do so into your elbow or sleeve rather than directly at another person.

Out of an abundance of caution, the AVMA recommends you take the same common-sense approach when interacting with your pets or other animals in your home, including service animals. You should tell your physician and public health official that you have a pet or other animal in your home. Although there have not been reports of pets becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. So, if you are ill with COVID-19, have another member of your household take care of walking, feeding, and playing with your pet. If you have a service animal or you must care for your pet, then wear a facemask; don't share food, kiss, or hug them; and wash your hands before and after any contact with your pet or service animal. You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. While we are recommending these as good practices, it is important to remember there is currently no evidence that pets can spread COVID-19 to other animals, including people.

Q: What should I do to prepare for my pet's care in the event I do become ill?

A: Identify another person in your household who is willing and able to care for your pet in your home should you contract COVID-19. Make sure you have an emergency kit prepared, with at least two weeks' worth of your pet's food and any needed medications. Usually we think about emergency kits like this in terms of what might be needed for an evacuation, but it's also good to have one prepared in the case of quarantine or self-isolation when you cannot leave your home.

Q: My pet or service animal needs to go to the veterinarian and I am not ill with COVID-19 – what should I do?

A: If you are not ill with COVID-19 or another communicable disease (e.g., cold, flu), call your veterinarian to make an appointment for your pet or service animal as you normally would. Depending on what services are required, and if you would prefer to remain in your home and you have an established relationship with the veterinarian (i.e., they have seen your pet/service animal in the recent past), telemedicine might be an excellent way to conduct your visit.

Always contact your veterinarian's office in advance to see what kind of appointment might work best for you and your pet/service animal in your particular situation.

Q: My pet or service animal needs to go to the veterinarian and I am ill with COVID-19 – what should I do?

A: If you are sick with COVID-19 or another communicable disease, you should stay at home, minimizing contact with other people, until you are well. Accordingly, if this is a non-urgent appointment that needs to be scheduled for your pet or service animal (e.g., annual wellness examination, routine vaccination, elective surgery), you should wait to schedule that appointment until your physician and/or your public health official believe you no longer present a risk of transmitting your infection to other people you may encounter during such a visit, including owners of pets or other animals and veterinary clinic staff.

If you are sick with COVID-19, and you believe your pet or service animal is ill, you should seek assistance from your veterinarian to determine how to best ensure your pet or service animal can be appropriately cared for while minimizing risks of transmitting COVID-19 to other people.

Don't forget – if you have an established relationship with your veterinarian (i.e., they have seen your pet/service animal in the recent past), telemedicine can be an excellent way to connect you, your pet/service animal, and your veterinarian. It can be used to help determine the urgency with which an animal needs to be seen and can also be used to conduct rechecks of certain types of ongoing medical problems.

Contact your veterinarian before heading to the veterinary hospital to see what they recommend for your particular situation.

Q: What should I do if my pet or service animal becomes ill after being around someone who has been sick with COVID-19?

A: Call your veterinarian before you bring your pet or service animal to the clinic. You should tell them why you are concerned about your animal being ill (e.g., what clinical signs of illness you are seeing) and also that the animal has been exposed to someone who has been sick with COVID-19. Advance notice will help your veterinarian determine whether your animal needs to be seen immediately and, if so, will support the veterinary clinic/hospital in preparing for the proper admittance of that animal, including the preparation of an isolation area as needed. Do not take the animal to a veterinary clinic until you have consulted with your veterinarian. And, of course, a telemedicine consult should be considered as an option as well.

Q: What precautions should be taken for animals that have recently been imported from high-risk areas?

A: Any animals imported into the United States will need to meet [CDC](#) and [USDA](#) requirements for entering the United States. At this time there is no evidence that pets can spread COVID-19. As with any animal introduced into a new environment, recently imported animals should be observed daily for signs of illness. If an animal becomes ill, the animal should be examined by a veterinarian. Call your veterinarian before bringing the animal into the clinic and let them know that the animal was imported from an area identified as high-risk for COVID-19.

Q: Is testing for SARS-CoV-2 available for animals in the United States?

A: IDEXX announced the availability of a test on March 13, but neither the CDC, AVMA, nor IDEXX is recommending pets be tested at this time. In announcing the availability of their test, IDEXX indicated that thousands of canine and feline specimens had been evaluated during their validation of the test and none had come up as being positive. These results align with the current expert understanding that COVID-19 is primarily transmitted person-to-person and supports current recommendations against testing pets for the COVID-19 virus. Dogs or cats with respiratory signs should be evaluated by a veterinarian for more common respiratory pathogens, before looking to evaluate them for COVID-19.

It's important to remember there is currently limited evidence that pets can be infected with SARS-CoV-2. There is no evidence to suggest that pets can spread COVID-19 to other people or other pets.