

# CORONAVIRUSES & PETS: Client Handout

The human coronavirus (COVID-19) is in the news a lot these days, and some reports are based on fact, others speculation. We don't have all the answers, but as a pet owner – or someone who spends a lot of time around pets – here's what you should know:

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- **FOLLOW CURRENT COVID-19 HEALTH OFFICIAL RECOMMENDATIONS** from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).
- Based on what we know now, and what is known about other coronaviruses, there is **NO EVIDENCE THAT DOGS OR CATS CAN BE A SOURCE OF COVID-19 INFECTION TO HUMANS OR OTHER ANIMALS**
- However, given **ANY SURFACE WITH WHICH A PERSON INFECTED WITH COVID-19 COMES INTO CONTACT MAY TRANSFER THE VIRUS** or viral RNA, including pet fur or nasal secretions – for example, if a dog licks an infected person's face. As such, it is advised to keep pets away from infected people, and to confine pets of infected people.
- **ALWAYS FOLLOW GOOD HANDWASHING AND HYGIENE PRACTICES, ESPECIALLY BEFORE AND AFTER INTERACTING WITH PETS.** Avoid contact with wildlife, including those kept as pets. Routinely clean and disinfect animal contact surfaces like cages and feeding areas, as well as immediately after contact with high-risk animals, such as wildlife and stray or free-roaming dogs and cats.
- **IF YOUR PET SHOWS SIGNS OF COUGHING, SNEEZING, LETHARGY OR OTHERWISE, CALL YOUR VETERINARIAN AT THE FIRST SIGN OF ILLNESS,** and keep them indoors as a precautionary measure. Signs of illness in dogs and cats are usually associated with various common viral and bacterial infections (kennel cough, canine flu, etc.) that are not transmissible to people.
- Stay apprised of the latest information from reputable sources such as:
  - World Small Animal Veterinary Association: Coronavirus & Companion Animals Advice
  - World Organization for Animal Health (OIE): Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
  - U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): About Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

## CORONAVIRUSES & PETS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Are dogs and cats at risk of contracting the virus that causes COVID-19?**

Based on what we know now, and what is known about other coronaviruses, there is no evidence that dogs or cats can be a source of COVID-19 infection to humans or other animals.

It's critical to follow current health official recommendations as this situation evolves. You can get the latest information from reputable sources such as:

- World Small Animal Veterinary Association: Coronavirus and Companion Animals Advice
- World Organization for Animal Health (OIE): Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): About Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

### **But what about the dogs in Hong Kong?**

According to the Hong Kong Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), dogs of infected owners in Hong Kong have been tested for COVID-19. Emerging evidence from a single dog suggests SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes human COVID-19) infection can occur in dogs. But due to the absence of symptoms and weakly positive results, it is unlikely the dog posed a transmission risk to other animals or humans.

Any surface with which a person infected with COVID-19 comes into contact may transfer the virus or viral RNA, including pet fur or nasal secretions – for example, if a dog licks an infected person's face. As such, good hygiene and proper hand-washing should be practiced when handling pets. It is also advised to keep pets away from infected people, and to confine pets of infected people.

### **Can pets contract SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), and do the latest reports from Hong Kong mean pets are a bigger risk than previously thought?**

The finding of antibodies in the dog's blood indicates it had an immune reaction to the virus and therefore confirms infection. However, the dog did not develop any signs indicative of COVID-19 disease. Most importantly, no live virus was found on the dog, and the result was only weakly positive, making it unlikely for the dog to pose a risk to transmit the virus to people or other animals.

### **Why does information about COVID-19 keep changing?**

COVID-19 is a newly emerging disease, and the situation is still evolving. We are learning more about the disease COVID-19 and the SARS-CoV-2 virus every day.

### **How can I protect my pet from exposure to the COVID-19 virus?**

While there is limited evidence to support risk of COVID-19 virus to your pet, we recommend the following precautions regardless:

- Wash hands after handling animals or their environment; supervise handwashing for children less than five years of age.
- Keep pets away from people confirmed to have COVID-19, and confine pets of infected people to limit potential spread.
- Protect your skin from direct contact with animal feces by wearing vinyl or household cleaning gloves or using a plastic bag when cleaning up after a pet.
- Promptly wash bites and scratches inflicted by animals.
- Do not allow pets to lick open wounds, cuts, medical devices or the faces of young children and immunocompromised people.
- Avoid contact with wildlife kept as pets, consumed as food and in the environment, and walk pets on a leash outdoors to prevent contact with wildlife.
- Routinely clean and disinfect animal contact surfaces (e.g., cages, feeding areas) and immediately after contact with high-risk species (such as wildlife or free-roaming or stray dogs and cats) or raw animal-based food items.
- Help ensure your pets remain healthy with regular veterinary visits and preventive care, including steps to control and prevent parasites, and seek veterinary care at the first sign of illness in your pet.

### **Should my pet wear a mask?**

No. There's no scientific evidence that face masks protect pets from infectious diseases or air pollutants, and masks have the potential to be unnecessarily scary or uncomfortable for pets.

**If pet fur can carry the virus, does that mean I should clean or wipe my pets down with bleach/alcohol/Clorox/Lysol, etc.?**

No. While it's easy to disinfect a doorknob or countertop with disinfectant wipes, alcohol or bleach, all of these things could harm your pet. Always use a mild shampoo and lots of water to bathe your pet, keep them clean, and avoid causing skin problems with harsher soaps or shampoos.

**Should I get my pet tested for COVID-19?**

At this time, testing pets for COVID-19 virus is unwarranted. There is currently no evidence that pet dogs or cats can be a source of infection to other animals or to humans.

People who test positive for COVID-19 should be isolated from others including children, spouses and pets to ensure that they do not inadvertently transfer infection, per World Health Organization recommendations.

**What about hygiene and care of my exotic pets (including rodents and ferrets)?**

COVID-19 is a human virus, and the greatest risk is transmission between people.

There is still no evidence that small exotic pets such as ferrets and hamsters can carry or transmit the virus that causes human COVID-19. As a precaution, we recommend keeping exotic pets in a safe enclosure and away from people infected with COVID-19.

**Should I be worried about Hantavirus, given a man in China recently died following infection?**

Hantavirus is not a newly emerging virus. Infections are rare and involve exposure to bites, urine or feces of rodents, rats and/or mice. Human-to-human transmission is very rare.

The symptoms for humans infected by Hantavirus are similar to those present in patients battling COVID-19 and include shortness of breath, coughing, headaches and fevers. While this is being reported in the news, Hantavirus is not related to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

As always, pet owners should maintain good hygiene standards when handling pets, and caution should be taken to avoid exposure to non-domesticated rats and mice. Pet rodents should be kept in sanitary conditions not exposed to wild members of these species.

**What if my pet's not feeling well or is showing signs of flu-like illness?**

If your pet shows any signs of illness, such as coughing, sneezing or lethargy, call your veterinarian immediately, and keep them indoors to prevent further spread. Signs of illness in dogs and cats are usually associated with various common viral and bacterial infections (kennel cough, canine flu, etc.) that are neither coronaviruses nor transmissible to people.

**What if I'm not feeling well, recently visited a high-risk area and/or am quarantined due to potential COVID-19 virus exposure, but my pet still needs medical attention?**

If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms or are quarantined due to potential coronavirus exposure, stay home and call your medical provider for advice on next steps.

If your pet does not require immediate veterinary care, keep them at home and avoid contact with other people and animals; we'll be happy to help you reschedule any appointments for your pet until you're well.

**If your pet needs to be seen urgently due to a life-threatening situation or illness:**

1. Call to confirm your veterinary clinic is equipped to treat patients that could have been exposed to COVID-19 virus and has adequate isolation facilities and staffing to care for your pet. While there is limited evidence that pets can be infected and no evidence that they pose a risk to others, this is purely a precaution because the virus is not well-understood.
2. Arrange for an unexposed/non-quarantined friend or family member to transport your pet to and from the veterinary clinic to limit potential exposure.

**What is known about other coronaviruses in cats and dogs?**

While there's still no limited evidence to support risk of COVID-19 virus infection to dogs or cats, there are other coronaviruses that do impact pets, none of which are transmissible to people:

- **Cats:** Feline enteric coronavirus (FCoV) causes a mild or asymptomatic infection in domestic cats, and most signs are gastrointestinal-related. The widespread virus is more common in areas of higher cat numbers (catteries, shelters).
- **Dogs:** Two known coronaviruses exist in dogs. The gastrointestinal form can range from asymptomatic or mild diarrhea to severe debilitating inflammation of the small intestine, which in puppies, will occasionally result in death. Most dogs have a mild disease consisting of cough, sneezing, and nasal discharge.

**What is the treatment for coronaviruses in pets?**

There is no specific treatment for coronaviruses in dogs or cats, as mild clinical signs are unlikely to require therapy. Supportive care, including replacement of lost fluids, nutritional support, and anti-nausea medication, may be used for more severe cases. Hospitalization is rarely necessary. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses and therefore will not help treat coronaviruses.

**Can manufactured pet food carry COVID-19 virus?**

It is highly unlikely that dry or canned pet foods are potential viral vectors.