

Coronaviruses and pets – client guidance

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The human coronavirus (COVID-19) is constantly in the news 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:

- **Follow current COVID-19 health official recommendations** from the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Based on what we know now, and what is known about other coronaviruses, there is no evidence that dogs or cats in a domestic environment can be a source of COVID-19 infection to humans and no evidence to support risk of the virus to pets.
- However, **any surface with which a person infected with COVID-19 comes into contact may transfer the virus** or viral RNA. As this could possibly include a pet's fur or nasal secretions, where possible it is advised to keep pets away from infected people or to keep contact to a minimum.
- **Always follow good handwashing and hygiene practices, especially before and after interacting with pets and any other animals.** Avoid contact with wildlife, including those kept as pets. Routinely clean and disinfect animal contact surfaces like cages and feeding areas.
- **If your pet shows signs of respiratory illness (coughing, sneezing, lethargy or otherwise), call your vet** and keep them isolated from other pets as a precautionary measure. These signs of illness in dogs and cats are usually associated with various viral and bacterial infections (kennel cough, cat flu, etc.) that are neither coronaviruses nor transmissible to people.
- Stay apprised of 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 \(COVID-19\)](#)

Coronaviruses and pets – frequently asked questions

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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 domestic dogs or cats can be a source of COVID-19 infection to humans or other animals. There is limited evidence to support risk of the virus to pets, and testing pets remains unwarranted. In an abundance of caution, however, it is advised where possible to keep pets away from infected people and to keep contact to a minimum. It's also important 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 \(COVID-19\)](#)

But what about the reports I'm hearing of dogs and cats (even lions and tigers) with low-level COVID-19?

According to reports, a small number of pets belonging to people infected with COVID-19 have been tested for the virus. Additionally, a tiger at New York's Bronx Zoo tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, is a human virus, and the largest known transmission risk (at this time) is between people, *not* from people to pets. There is limited evidence to support risk of the virus to pets, and testing pets remains unwarranted.

In an abundance of caution, however, it is advised where possible to keep pets away from infected people and to keep contact to a minimum. 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. As such, good hand and respiratory hygiene should be practiced when handling pets. It is also advised to keep pets away from infected people, and to confine pets of infected people.

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.

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

Whilst there is currently no evidence to support risk of COVID-19 virus to your pet, we recommend the following precautions regardless:

Routine everyday hygiene

- Wash hands after handling animals or their environment; supervise handwashing for children less than five years of age.
- Protect your skin from direct contact with animal faeces 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.**
- 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 preventive care, including steps to control and prevent parasites. Call your vet at the first sign of illness in your pet.

Is there a COVID-19 vaccine for cats and dogs?

There is no COVID-19 vaccine for pets at this time.

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.

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If pet fur can carry the virus, does that mean I should wipe my pets down with bleach/alcohol, 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. There is currently no evidence to support additional bathing of pets as a result of COVID-19. When you do bathe your pet, always use a mild shampoo specifically formulated for pets and lots of water to avoid causing skin problems with harsher soaps or shampoos.

Should I get my pet tested for COVID-19?

At this time there is no evidence of transmission of virus from pets to people meaning testing pets for SARS-CoV-2 is unwarranted. In an abundance of caution, however, where possible it is advised to keep pets away from infected people and to confine pets of infected people. As our understanding of virus transmission advances our recommendations might be adjusted as necessary

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 faeces 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.

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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 vet and keep them indoors as a precautionary measure. These signs of illness in dogs and cats are usually associated with various viral and bacterial infections (kennel cough, cat flu, etc.) that are neither coronaviruses nor transmissible to people.

What if I am in isolation at home or showing symptoms of COVID-19 and I think my pet needs medical attention?

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 you think your pet requires urgent attention, you should call your veterinary practice. They will assess the urgency of the situation and decide whether a consultation can be undertaken without having to see your pet or if a "hands-on" physical examination is necessary. If your pet needs to be seen, further advice will be given on the procedure for bringing your pet to the practice, such as arranging for an unexposed / non-quarantined friend or family member to transport your pet.

Should I get rid of my pet(s) to be sure they will not transfer the virus to my family?

No. Currently there is no evidence that domestic dogs or cats can be a source of infection to humans or other animals. Pet ownership can have health, emotional and social benefits. Following strict hygienic practices and taking responsible precautions means families and pets can safely stay together.

SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, is a human virus, and the largest known transmission risk (at this time) is between people, *not* from people to pets. However, people who test positive for COVID-19 should be isolated from other people and pets, per World Health Organization recommendations. People should also continue to practice good hygiene – especially thorough handwashing – before and after interacting with pets.

Can manufactured pet food carry COVID-19 virus?

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