

This page will be updated as new information becomes available

Pets and COVID-19 Key Points

At this time, we do not have evidence that a companion animal can infect humans with this new coronavirus.

While there is evidence of transmission from humans to dogs and cats, it does not appear to be a common event at this time.

Dogs that have tested positive have never shown signs of illness.

Animals tests for COVID-19 are specific to animals and performed by veterinary diagnostic laboratories, NOT human laboratories.

If you suspect that you are ill with COVID-19, you should practice the same precautions with your pet as you would with people – wear a mask, keep your distance, wash hands regularly, and avoid cuddling and other close contact.

Have any animals tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19?

Two dogs in Hong Kong have tested positive for the new coronavirus. The test used is a nasal swab that detects the presence of virus genetic material. This test is VERY sensitive, meaning you can get a positive even if the virus is in pieces or unable to infect others. These may be cases of infection, but not illness nor does it prove the ability to transmit infection to others.

The first dog, a 17-year-old Pomeranian, tested positive on a swab test after the owner was diagnosed with COVID-19. The dog spent time in quarantine until the nasal swab was negative. While in quarantine, the dog never showed evidence of illness or signs of COVID-19. The first blood test performed to look for signs of an immune response to COVID-19 was negative, but the final blood test performed was positive. That positive result shows that the dog was likely infected, but without symptoms.¹

Two days after a negative nasal swab and being released to the owner, the dog passed away of unknown causes. The owner declined a necropsy (autopsy of a non-human animal). It is extremely likely that the dog passed away from old age, other known health issues, and the stress of quarantine. It is very unlikely that this dog died due to COVID-19, especially since the dog never exhibited signs of illness.¹

The second dog, a 2-year-old German shepherd, tested positive on a swab test after the owner was diagnosed with COVID-19. The other dog in the household tested negative. This dog is now

under quarantine and will continue to be tested until a negative test is confirmed. Blood tests will also be monitored.²

On March 27, 2020, it was reported that a cat in Belgium tested positive from a feces sample. The cat was symptomatic, having diarrhea, vomiting, and breathing difficulties. The cat's owner began showing symptoms of the virus a week before the cat. Further information is pending.³

A second cat tested positive in Hong Kong on March 31 on mouth, nose, and rectal swabs, but has not yet exhibited signs of illness.⁴

On April 5, 2020, it was reported that a tiger at the Bronx Zoo tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19. She, three other tigers, and 3 lions developed a dry cough. Because testing requires anesthesia, they only tested one cat, but it is presumed that all the symptomatic cats likely have COVID-19. There are other tigers at the zoo that have not developed signs at this time, and none of the other large cats (leopards, cheetahs, pumas, or servals) have shown signs of illness. Infection occurred due to exposure to a caretaker with COVID, prior to that person developing symptoms.⁵

In the United States, IDEXX, a veterinary testing service, announced that they have developed a test for COVID-19 in pets. In the process of validating this new test, thousands of samples (collected for other reasons) were tested from the U.S.; all tests for COVID-19 in those cats and dogs were negative.⁶

All of this information to date indicates that dogs and cats are able to be infected by the COVID-19 virus, but it appears to be an infrequent occurrence. In Hong Kong, at least 17 dogs and 9 cats have been tested from homes with owners that were either confirmed COVID-19 cases or were close contacts to a COVID-19 patient, and only 2 dogs and 1 cat have tested positive. Again, **infection is not evidence of being able to spread the virus to humans**, but the situation is evolving and will be monitored.

Are there any studies investigating the COVID-19 virus in animals?

A study out of the University of Minnesota and University of North Carolina looked at which animals have the most similar receptors to the virus when compared to humans. These receptors are used by the virus to enter the cell and cause infection. The study observed cats, ferrets, pigs, and non-human primates have the most similar receptors to human receptors.⁷

A small study (**not peer reviewed or published at this time**) out of an OIE collaborating research center in China investigated the ability of ferrets, dogs, cats, pigs, chickens, and ducks to become infected with the COVID-19 virus. Both ferrets and cats were able to be infected through direct exposure (placing virus into the nose). One cat became infected through close contact alone, which suggests that cats are able to spread the virus through respiratory droplets to other cats. Dogs were able to become infected with direct exposure, but did not

become infected through close contact, and none of the dogs had symptoms. The pigs, chickens, and ducks did not become infected.⁸

Should I avoid contact with my pet?

Because this virus is new and we are still learning, as a precaution you should restrict contact with your pets if you are diagnosed with COVID-19. If this is not possible, wash your hands before touching your pet, avoid snuggling and other close contact, and wear a facemask or something to cover your nose and mouth.

Should I monitor my pet for anything?

There are no specific recommendations or guidelines at this time. However, in general, monitor your pet for any signs of illness (coughing, sneezing, excessive sleepiness, vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty breathing). Contact your veterinarian if these occur, particularly if your pet has been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19.

Should my pet wear a facemask?

No. Currently, there are shortages of supplies such as facemasks, and medical personnel and those sick with COVID-19 should have first access to these masks. Additionally, especially in certain breeds, masks can cause breathing difficulty.

Should I get my pet vaccinated for coronavirus?

There is currently no vaccine for the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. The canine coronavirus vaccine is not effective for preventing COVID-19, it is only effective for preventing canine coronavirus, which is a virus that causes severe diarrhea. They are two **different** coronaviruses.

References

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