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SARS-CoV-19 virus and COVID-19 Disease: Animal Update

We at the National Veterinary Laboratory hope that you, and your staff and family, are all well at this stressful time. We know that hospitals are practicing the recommended separations and minimal or no clients allowed into the hospital during veterinary visits. We are including our Spring Newsletter covering the COVID-19 pandemic with updated material in this communication. The pandemic is by no means ending, we still have a while to go before life can return to normal.

Updates May, 2020:



Cats and Dogs Infected with SARS-CoV19 Virus: There have been additional cats and dogs reported infected with the SARS-CoV-19 virus in this country. Most of the reports of the infected animals have been from households where one of the owners was infected with the virus. At this time, many veterinary and medical organizations are downplaying the possibility that infected cats or dogs are likely to infect people. These conclusions are based on the fact that no one has looked and tested to see if infected cats or dogs haven't in fact infected people in households. Until this is investigated fully, we cannot conclude that infected cats or dogs are not dangerous to veterinarians, veterinary staff, or to pet owners.

SARS-CoV-19 Virus and Animal Shelters: A disturbing incident was portrayed in a TV news report in the New York City area in late April, where 2 elderly individuals in a household succumbed to COVID-19 disease. Their adorable friendly dog was then placed in a shelter and within a day or so a new owner adopted the dog and proudly carried the dog, snuggling face to face, while exiting the shelter. It was not known if the shelter tested the dog for the SARS-CoV-19 virus or just adopted the dog to the qualified person. Were there warnings about the dog possibly being infected with the virus? This was not portrayed in the news report. It is my, (Dr. Hardy) personal recommendation that any dog or cat turned over to a shelter from a COVID-19 household be tested for the virus. If the test result is negative, the animal should still be quarantined from all other animals for 14 days. If the animal remains healthy for the 14 days, it is acceptable for adoption. I recommend this protocol until enough studies have been done to determine if infected cats and dogs can transmit the SARS-CoV-19 virus to people (reverse zoonosis).

The University of Pennsylvania, School of Veterinary Medicine has a program to try to train dogs to scent differentiate between COVID-19 positive and negative patients which, if possible, would enable rapid and accurate determination of infected people.

CDC Recommendations: April 22, 2020

Here are the verbatim CDC recommendations regarding pet animals.

“Until we know more, CDC recommends the following:

- Do not let pets interact with people or other animals outside the household.
- Keep cats indoors when possible to prevent them from interacting with other animals or people.
- Walk dogs on a leash, maintaining at least 6 feet from other people and animals.
- Avoid dog parks or public places where a large number of people and dogs gather.

If you are sick with COVID-19 (either suspected or confirmed by a test), restrict contact with your pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.

- When possible, have another member of your household care for your pets while you are sick.
- Avoid contact with your pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food or bedding.
- If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wear a cloth face covering and wash your hands before and after you interact with them.”

AVMA Recommendations: May 6, 2020

If a cat or dog becomes sick with respiratory or gastrointestinal signs, veterinarians should first test for common pathogens and conditions that are more likely to have caused such clinical signs. Regulatory authorities and animal health experts (USDA, CDC, FDA, NASPHV, National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials [NASAHO], AVMA) indicate that testing may be justified if:

- Animal has clinical signs consistent with SARS-CoV-2, and more common causes ruled out, and the animal has been in close contact with a person suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
- Animal was exposed to a known high-risk environment where a COVID-19 outbreak occurred, e. g., a residence, facility (e.g., nursing home, prison), or cruise ship.
- Atypical patterns of disease suggesting a novel pathogen in a mass care situation (e.g., animal shelter, boarding facility, animal feeding operation, zoo) where exposure history is not known (appropriate diagnostics should be undertaken first to rule out more common causes of illness).

The decision to test should be made collaboratively between the veterinarian and local, state, and federal public health and animal and health officials. If samples are sent to state animal health, university, or private laboratories for initial testing, all samples should be collected by a licensed, and preferably USDA-accredited, veterinarian in duplicate because positive samples must be confirmed through additional testing by the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa. Different states may also have different requirements for testing and collaborating with and reporting to public health and animal health officials.

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/covid-19-faqs-veterinarians-and-veterinary-clinics>

Conclusion:

Experimental studies show that cats are more susceptible than dogs to SARS-CoV-19 and they can transmit the virus to other cats by aerosols. Until additional studies have been completed, veterinarians cannot be certain that infected cats or dogs **cannot** transmit the SARS-CoV-19 virus to people and act as a reservoir, vector or fomite (reverse zoonosis).

Excellent source for veterinarians and animal owners: <https://time.com/5820118/coronavirus-questions-answered/>