



March 16, 2020

All commonwealth veterinarians,

While this virus seems to have emerged from an animal source, it is now spreading from **person-to-person**. At this time, there is no evidence that companion animals, including pets, can spread COVID-19. However, since animals can spread other diseases to people, it is always a good idea to wash your hands and use appropriate hygiene before and after interacting with animals.

Given community transmission of COVID-19 in the U.S., it is possible that many people, including clients and/or staff may become ill. Veterinary clinics should consider the following:

- Educate your clients on the differences between the enteric coronaviruses that circulate in domestic animals, and for which we can vaccinate, and this novel coronavirus which, though it shares the same common name, is in fact something quite different. Even though laboratory tests for COVID-19 in animals are being developed and advertised now, there is still no epidemiological evidence that animals play a role in the transmission of this virus, nor is there evidence that they can become infected themselves. Public health is not recommending you test pets for COVID-19 at this time; instead rule out other common causes of patient symptoms.
  - The dog tested in Hong Kong<sup>1</sup> was tested using a real time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), which is sensitive, specific, and not cross-reactive with other coronaviruses of dogs and cats, but it cannot distinguish whether samples contain intact viruses, which are infectious, or only fragments of RNA; therefore, interpretation of test results in animals that are asymptomatic is difficult.
  - A recent news report<sup>2</sup> indicated this dog recently tested negative for viral RNA via RT-PCR, as well as negative on a serological antibody test, suggesting the dog was not infected with the virus; however, it may take up to 14 days or more for measurable levels of antibodies to be detected.
  - Contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH to speak to the state public health veterinarian if you are seeing a new, concerning illness in a patient that has had close contact with a person with COVID-19.
- For all upcoming appointments, determine how you would classify pets as needing to be urgently seen, versus ones that need routine care or surgery that could possibly be delayed.
- If a client has a pet with an urgent need for veterinary attention and the client is a case of COVID-19, asymptomatic but under in-house quarantine or sick and isolated at home, please consider how you might arrange for the pet to receive an evaluation. It is recommended that a family member or friend pick up the pet in a pet carrier if the owner cannot leave the home.
- If someone who is known to be infected with COVID-19 should contact you, the recommendation is to have a different member of the household care for the animal, if possible. The ill owner/household member should avoid contact with the pet as with other household members, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked and sharing food. If



the ill individual must care for the pet, they should wash their hands before and after interacting with the pet and wear a facemask if one is available.

- Consider making arrangements to have clients call you from their car upon arrival and have someone from your practice pick up the animal outside so the client does not have to come inside the practice. Discuss care measures via cell phone.
- Recommend implementing restriction of employee visitors (family, friends, and pets) to business purposes only, and limiting the number of people coming into the clinic.
- Because there is no vaccine available to prevent COVID-19, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid exposure to the virus and to follow strict handwashing and hygiene protocols.
  - Designate your practice/workplace as a temporary NO HANDSHAKE ZONE. Ask colleagues and clients to refrain from shaking hands (fist bumps or forearm bumps are good substitutes).
  - Practice good hygiene: Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the restroom; before eating; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; and between client/patient visits.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60-95% alcohol.
  - Place hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, and tissues in all exam rooms, meeting rooms, restrooms, break rooms, lobbies, and other common areas.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
  - Cough or sneeze into your elbow or use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth, then throw the tissue into the trash and wash your hands.
  - Voluntary home isolation: If you are ill with symptoms of respiratory disease, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills or fatigue, stay at home. If you become ill during a shift, go home immediately. The CDC recommends that you remain at home until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever (100 degrees F or 37.8 degrees C), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medications (e.g. cough suppressants).
  - Take steps to prevent the spread of disease among veterinary personnel and to/from clients by following guidelines and procedures laid out in the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarian's Compendium of Veterinary Standard Precautions for Zoonotic Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel. While the primary focus of this resource is controlling the spread of pathogens between animals and veterinary personnel, many of its principles apply to infection control in general and following it is simply good practice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Betsy Schroeder'.

Betsy Schroeder, DVM, MPH

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## Additional COVID-19 tips and information

### From the CDC:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#2019-nCoV-and-animals>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/interim-guidance-managing-people-in-home-care-and-isolation-who-have-pets.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

### From the AVMA:

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

### From the NASPHV

- <http://www.nasphv.org/documentsCompendiaVet.html>

### From the WHO:

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

### From the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE):

- <https://www.oie.int/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>

### From the World Small Animal Veterinary Association:

- <https://wsava.org/news/highlighted-news/the-new-coronavirus-and-companion-animals-advice-for-wsava-members/>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2020/02/20200228/20200228\\_093205\\_796.html](https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2020/02/20200228/20200228_093205_796.html)

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2020/03/20200312/20200312\\_204009\\_556.html](https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2020/03/20200312/20200312_204009_556.html)