

COVID-19 - An update for WSAVA Members

May 29th, 2020

Since our last E-shot, there have been a number of notable findings concerning the role SARS-CoV-2 plays in the health of companion animals. We will be adding translations of the content in several languages to the [WSAVA's COVID-19 resource hub](#) over the next few days. It contains a wealth of resources on COVID-19 and companion animals to help you. New content is being added frequently so please check it regularly and urge your members to do the same.

The interrelated topics that have generated the most discussion in the past weeks are:

1. New reports of SARS-CoV-2 infection or antibodies in cats or dogs around the world.
2. A new paper in experimentally inoculated cats that suggests minimal illness and short term shedding of infectious virus.
3. The suggestion to incorporate questions about the presence of acute gastrointestinal or respiratory signs of disease into the personal protective equipment (PPE) for pets requiring veterinary attention.
4. Knowing how to safely social distance to protect human health, animal health, as well as animal welfare.
5. Questions on the potential for an animal infected with SARS-CoV-2 to initiate a new human infection.

In our last update, we discussed the first two cats in the United States to test positive for SARS-CoV-2 RNA by rtPCR assay.

- [CDC Media Statement](#)
- [USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service](#)

Since then, qRT-PCR or antibody-positive cats have been reported in many countries including Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and Russia.

Official reports from a country's Veterinary Authority are available on the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)'s website. The infection of animals with SARS-CoV-2 meets the criteria of an emerging disease. Therefore, any case of infection of animals with SARS-CoV-2 should be reported the OIE in accordance with the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*.

OIE - Weekly Disease Information

Another way for you to find and read the information concerning early reports of possible animal cases is to use the ProMED International Society for Infectious Diseases website (promed@promedmail.org).

Once you are in the site, click on the SEARCH POSTS icon on the right side of the screen. You can then enter COVID-19 (or SARS-CoV-2) AND the species of interest into the keywords box to find all the postings.

To find new publications, [the PubMed website](#) is a great search engine to use. For example, you will find that the original 2 dogs with SARS-CoV-2 in Hong Kong have now been published in *Nature*.

Sit THC, Brackman CJ, Ip SM, et al. Infection of dogs with SARS-CoV-2 [published online ahead of print, 2020 May 14]. Nature. 2020;10.1038/s41586-020-2334-5. doi:10.1038/s41586-020-2334-5

The data collected to date documents that an infected human can potentially infect some companion animal species. These findings support the recommendations in place since the start of the pandemic that if you or a family member is sick with COVID-19, avoid infecting your pets as well as other family members as the syndrome resolves. How often exposed companion animals become infected is unknown.

In one recent report, 9 cats and 12 dogs living with 2 veterinary students positive for SARS-CoV-2 and 11 other students with suggestive symptoms of COVID-19 were tested by qRT-PCR and serology and all were negative.

Temmam S, Barbarino A, Maso D, et al. Absence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in cats and dogs in close contact with a cluster of COVID-19 patients in a veterinary campus. bioRxiv preprint doi

Read the paper here

There have now been 2 peer reviewed papers confirming SARS-CoV-2 can infect some experimentally inoculated companion animals, including cats and ferrets. A cat with primary infection can also shed enough live virus to infect a secondarily exposed cat. Clinical signs have been minimal in adult animals. The most recent study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* suggests in 3 cats that the shedding period for live virus is less than 14 days.

Jianzhong Shi, Zhiyuan Wen, Gongxun Zhong, et al. Susceptibility of ferrets, cats, dogs, and other domesticated animals to SARS-coronavirus-2. Science 10.1126/science.abb7015 (2020)

Halfmann PJ, Hatta M, Chiba S, et al. Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in Domestic Cats. New Engl J Med 2020 DOI: 10.1056/NEJMc2013400

Read the CDC Guidance here

CDC has released guidance on What to Do if Your Pet Tests Positive for the Virus that Causes COVID-19 which lets you know how to safely interact with a companion

animal that is positive for SARS-CoV-2.

Much more information to detail clinical manifestations of SARS-CoV-2 in companion animals is needed. The data available to date suggests subclinical infections, or self-limited gastrointestinal (hyporexia, vomiting, diarrhea) or respiratory (sneezing, coughing, ocular discharge) are most common. Since the disease manifestations are mild and no specific treatments are available, many countries are still maintaining strict guidelines on which pets should be tested.

CDC - Evaluation for SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Animals

CCVO Position Statement: Testing of Animals for SARS-CoV-2

OIE - Considerations for sampling, testing, and reporting of SARS-CoV-2

However, many guidelines around the world now recommend considering the likelihood of exposure to a SARS-CoV-2-infected person and the presence of acute gastrointestinal or respiratory clinical signs of disease when determining how to handle a dog or cat in the veterinary clinic in regards to PPE. While these decisions need to be made by each veterinary health care provider, the following is one example.

- [CDC - Guidance for Veterinary Clinics](#)

Social distancing of pets and well as their people was recently suggested as a control measure for SARS-CoV-2 infection while more is learned about this viral infection of pets.

- [CDC - If you have pets](#)

Suggesting that cats be required to be housed indoors and closure of dog parks by some municipalities caused concerns in many individuals that were also attempting to factor in the welfare of the pet during the pandemic.

- [BVA statement on cats and Covid-19](#)
- [Covid-19: Don't start keeping your cats indoors](#)

The WSAVA One Health Committee fully agrees that the welfare of the pet should always be considered. However, while the pandemic is being controlled, the One Health Committee agrees it is very important to practice social distancing of pets from people outside the household, as well as from people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 during their illness.

Whether an infected animal can pass on SARS-CoV-2 to a previously uninfected human is still unclear. Recently, possible sharing of SARS-CoV-2 infections from mink in the Netherlands to farm workers was reported based on genetic sequencing results. However, further information is needed to prove direct zoonotic

transmission even in this situation as it is difficult to prove which direction infection occurred (mink to man, man to mink, man to man).

- [ProMED - Letter to parliament on developments in COVID-19 on mink farms \(Netherlands\)](#)
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Please let us know if you have questions or comments. Stay safe!

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World Small Animal Veterinary Association

www.wsava.org

Vision Statement: All companion animals worldwide receive veterinary care that ensures their optimal health and welfare

Mission Statement: To advance the health and welfare of companion animals worldwide through an educated, committed and collaborative global community of veterinary peers



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