



COVID-19 - An update for WSAVA Members

April 29th, 2021

Following our update in March, a number of dogs and cats in Texas were shown to have antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 as part of an active surveillance project of pets owned by people with COVID-19.

Cases of SARS-CoV-2 in Animals (USA)

However, since March, no new dog or cat SARS-CoV-2 cases proven by RT-PCR or virus isolation have been posted on the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) website.

OIE website - Planning for emergencies: COVID-19

Most of the SARS-CoV-2 discussions in the last month have centered around the worldwide efforts to vaccinate people. However, on March 31, Russia announced that it had approved the world's first COVID-19 vaccine for pets.

COVID-19 Vaccine for Animals

The vaccine, known as Carnivac-Cov, underwent clinical trials on dogs, cats, mink, and other animals. According to the vaccine developers, all tested animals developed coronavirus antibodies which led to the conclusion that the vaccine is harmless and has high immunogenicity. The government agency developing the vaccine said doses could be widely available in a few months.

According to Russia's Federal Service for Veterinary Supervision, a vaccine for pets was required as an insurance against variants that could spread more easily. The agency said that it had developed the vaccine for animals, partly as a public health tool in case the virus spread from animals to humans or — in a worst-case scenario — mutated in animals and then spread back to humans in a more virulent form.

The announcement from Russia and a previous [article published in January in the New York Post](#) suggesting that a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine for dogs and cats could be needed has fueled discussions by pet owners around the world who are now wondering whether their pet should be vaccinated against the virus and whether the vaccine is safe.

The WSAVA One Health and Scientific Advisory Committees believe that several facts should be considered regarding the vaccination of dogs and cats against SARS-CoV-2. The two primary reasons to vaccinate animals would be:

- to lessen the potential for zoonotic transmission to people (in the same way as rabies, for example)

- to lessen the potential for significant illness in vaccinated pets.

While SARS-CoV-2 is known to infect several animal species, including dogs and cats, humans are the primary source of the infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is currently no evidence that pets play a significant role in spreading the virus to people, and the risk of pets spreading COVID-19 to people is low. There have been no cases in which a dog or a cat has been proven to transmit the virus to people. So, at the moment, there is no apparent need for a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine for dogs and cats from a public health standpoint.

CDC's recommendations

It is important to also stress that although cats and dogs can be infected by SARS-CoV-2 after exposure to an infected human, subclinical infection or mild, self-limited clinical signs generally develop. In addition, no dog or cat is known to have died from the infection to date. Thus, the need for a vaccine to lessen clinical signs of COVID-19 in dogs and cats is questionable. Vaccination is an important and fundamental part of veterinary practice and should be considered as individualized medicine, personalized for the needs of the individual pet, based on an individualized risk-benefit assessment. Vaccination should be performed as often as necessary, but we need to reduce the unnecessary administration of vaccine antigens to dogs and cats.

The Carnivac-Cov vaccine developers should be complimented for producing a product that induces antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 in dogs and cats. However, the WSAVA believes that additional information is needed prior to use of the vaccine in client-owned pets. In particular, studies should be performed to confirm that vaccine administration lessens illness and live SARS-CoV-2 shedding after challenge and, if so, what the duration of immunity is likely to be.

It remains our opinion that there is no need for owners to consider vaccinating their pets against SARS-CoV-2 at this time. As SARS-CoV-2 infection of dogs and cats most commonly originates from an infected human, the best way to protect a pet is to vaccinate the owner so that they are less likely to infect their pet.

Dr. Lappin is the current WSAVA One Health Chair and, as such, represents WSAVA on the COVID Council in the United States. On April 8, [Trupanion](#) Medical Insurance for Pets reconvened the COVID Council for the latest in a series of webinars intended to help communities manage COVID-19. The webinar which has reached over 930,000 views to date, featured the CDC/One Health Deputy Director, Dr. Colin Basler, University of Guelph's Professor Dr. Scott Weese, Trupanion Chief Veterinary Officer and [MightyVet](#) Founder, Dr. Steve Weinrauch, Not One More Vet President, Dr. Carrie Journey, and Dr. Lappin.

Access the webinar here

This seminar was streamed live and is now available. The discussion was directed to pet owners and is presented in English. The speakers also discussed whether vaccines for SARS-CoV-2 are needed now or potentially in the future.

Please let us know if you have questions or comments. Stay safe!

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[Visit the WSAVA COVID-19 resource hub here](#)

World Small Animal Veterinary Association
www.wsava.org

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

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