



Domestic Companion Animals and COVID-19

June 8, 2020

We are still learning about how the virus that causes COVID-19 can affect animals. A small number of pets (cats and dogs) have been confirmed to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, mostly after close contact with a person with COVID-19. Some pets did not show any signs of illness, but those pets that did get sick all had mild disease that could be taken care of at home. None of the pets have died.

Based on the limited information available now, the risk of pets spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low. There is no reason to abandon or surrender pets that have been confirmed positive for the virus that causes COVID-19.

The clinical spectrum of illness for the SARS-CoV-2 virus remains largely undefined in animals. Animals may present with respiratory or gastrointestinal clinical signs based on the presentation of other coronaviruses more commonly found in animals as well as other emerging coronaviruses, including SARS-CoV-1 infection. Clinical signs expected to be compatible with possible SARS-CoV-2 infection in mammalian animals include:

- Fever
- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Lethargy
- Sneezing
- Nasal/Ocular discharge
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Guidance for people with COVID-19 infection who have pets

People with COVID-19 and in home isolation should be advised to restrict interaction with household animals, in addition to following other prevention measures to protect others from COVID-19. Specifically, while a person with COVID-19 is symptomatic, they should maintain separation from household animals as they would with other household members, and avoid direct contact with pets. If possible, a household member should be designated to care for pets in the home and should follow standard handwashing practices before and after interacting with the household animal. If a person with COVID-19 must care for pets or other animals, they should ensure they wash their hands before and after caring for them.

COVID-19 testing in domestic companion animals:

Routine testing of companion animals for COVID-19 is currently not recommended. Testing may be considered for mammalian species in certain situations. Veterinarians are strongly encouraged to rule out other, more common causes of illness before considering COVID-19 testing. Tests for COVID-19 in animals should only be considered for animals with COVID-19 symptoms and that have been exposed to a person with COVID-19. Testing for COVID-19 is available for animals at a limited number of commercial laboratories (including IDEXX, Zoetis, and Zoologix). Veterinarians are advised to consult with NJDOH when considering testing for COVID-19. Veterinarians should report all COVID-19 positive laboratory results to NJDOH; additional confirmatory testing may be required.

Testing at public health/agriculture laboratories may be considered on a case-by-case basis if certain criteria are met. Requests for public health/agriculture testing will be considered when a veterinarian reports:

1. A new, concerning illness that cannot be otherwise explained **AND**
2. The domestic companion animal has had close contact with a person with COVID-19 infection **AND**
3. Common companion animal illnesses have been ruled out by testing for infectious and non-infectious diseases. Rule-out testing will vary according to the situation, but may include respiratory disease RT-PCR panels, diarrhea RT-PCR panels, and cultures.

To discuss COVID-19 testing, veterinarians should contact NJDOH during daytime hours at (609) 826-4872 or (609) 826-5964 or email zoonoticrn@doh.nj.gov.

COVID-19 positive pets:

RESTRICT ACTIVITIES: If your pet is tested for COVID-19 and tests positive, depending on how sick your pet is, your veterinarian may recommend that your pet be isolated at home. If your pet develops new symptoms or is getting worse, call your veterinarian. Pets under home isolation should be kept at home, except to get medical care. Even if your pet appears to be feeling better, avoid the following activities until your veterinarian determines that it is safe for your pet to do so or your pet has met the guidance to end their isolation:

- Visits to veterinary hospitals, without calling the veterinarian first
- Visits to human healthcare facilities or schools
- Visits to parks (including dog parks), markets, or other gatherings such as festivals
- Visits to the groomer, including mobile grooming salons
- Visits to pet daycares or boarding facilities
- Other outings such as playdates, hikes, or visiting other homes, with or without pets
- Using dog walkers or pet-sitters that live outside your home

SEPARATE FROM OTHERS: While at home, have your pet stay in a designated “sick room” (such as a laundry room or extra bathroom) if possible, or otherwise be separated from people and other animals. This is the same way a person with COVID-19 would separate from others in their household. Avoid contact with the pet as much as possible, including, petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food or bedding. If possible, provide a separate litterbox or bathroom area from other pets.

- **DOGS:** If you have a private backyard where your dog can go to the bathroom, do not take them for walks. If you must walk your dog, limit it to bathroom breaks only, stay close to your home, and keep your pet at least 6 feet away from other pets and people. Do not let other people touch or interact with your dog.
- **CATS:** Cats should be kept inside. Do not allow cats that have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 to roam outside.

CLEAN UP: There is no evidence to suggest that waste from infected pets needs any additional disinfection. Wear gloves when cleaning up after your pet, and place fecal material or litterbox waste in a sealed bag before disposing. Always wash your hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning up after your pet.

- Provide bedding, bowls or containers, treats, and toys that are separate from those used by other people or animals in the household.
- Disinfect bowls, toys, and other animal care items with an EPA-registered disinfectant and rinse thoroughly with clean water afterwards.
- Soft items like towels, blankets, and other bedding, can be safely laundered and reused. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill animal can be washed with other items.

PROTECT YOURSELF: Follow similar recommended precautions as for people caring for an infected person at home. If you are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, another household member should care for the pet, if possible.

- People should wear a cloth face covering and gloves in the same room or area as the sick pet. Animals should not wear a cloth face covering or mask. Do not try to put a cloth face covering on your pet.
- Use gloves when handling the pet’s dishes, toys, or bedding and when picking up feces (poop). Throw out gloves and place waste material or litterbox waste in a sealed bag before throwing away in a trashcan lined with a trash bag. Always wash your hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning up after your pet.
- Clean your hands regularly throughout the day.
- Do not wipe or bathe your pet with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or other products not intended or approved for use on animals. There is no evidence that viruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19, can spread to people or other

animals from the skin, fur, or hair of pets. Using chemical disinfectants on your pet could make them very sick or kill them.

ENDING HOME ISOLATION: Follow your veterinarian's advice for when it is safe for your pet to be around other people and animals. If the animal is not being monitored by a veterinarian, owners should keep them isolated until:

- At least 72 hours since their clinical signs of illness have resolved without the use of medications intended to relieve symptoms; **AND**
- At least 14 days have passed since their clinical signs first appeared.

References

- [CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Veterinary Clinics During the COVID-19 Response](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus Households with Pets](#)
- [CDC What to do if your pet tests positive](#)
- [AVMA Interim recommendations for intake of companion animals from households where humans with COVID-19 are present](#)
- [OIE guidance](#)
- [National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians Compendium of Veterinary Standard Precautions for Zoonotic Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel](#)