

COVID-19 and Your Pet – What You Need to Know

Tragically, owners are taking drastic measures and abandoning or even killing their pets, fearing they might harbor the deadly coronavirus, COVID-19. There's much we don't know about the zoonotic potential of this virus, but here's what we know at this point regarding your furry family members.

By Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The current human coronavirus outbreak that originated in Wuhan, China, called COVID-19, has some pet parents worried, and others taking unnecessary and drastic measures against their animal companions
- The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is transmitted by humans to other humans — one dog living with an infected owner in Hong Kong has been placed in quarantine due to repeated “weak positive” test results; the dog has shown no clinical symptoms
- Per the OIE World Organisation for Animal Health, “There is no evidence that dogs play a role in the spread of this human disease or that they become sick. Further studies are needed to understand if and how different animals could be affected by COVID-19 virus”
- There’s no need for pet parents to avoid or abandon animal companions; if no one in your home has the virus, as always, wash your hands after handling your pets and include them in your emergency preparedness planning
- If someone in your household is diagnosed with COVID-19, it’s wise to limit interactions with pets along with other human family members

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published March 15, 2020.

Unless you've been visiting another planet for the last few months, I'm sure you're aware of the coronavirus outbreak in humans that originated in China in late December.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses capable of making both humans and animals sick. These viruses can cause respiratory infections in humans ranging from the common cold to serious diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

The most recent outbreak, which is triggering widespread concern across the globe, involves an infectious coronavirus disease called COVID-19, which was unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China at the end of last year.

If you're looking for more information on COVID-19 in humans, the World Health Organization (WHO) has created a page on its website: [**Q&A on coronaviruses \(COVID-19\)**](#). You might also be interested in keeping track of the latest developments at this dashboard: [Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak: Latest news, information and updates](#).

It's important to keep in mind that at the present time this is an ever-evolving situation rife with competing theories and conspiracies, widespread mis- and disinformation, politics, etc. My goal today is to update you about what we know at this point regarding COVID-19 and furry family members.

Animals and COVID-19

According to veterinary publication dvm360, there are reports of animals being abandoned or killed because their owners fear they might harbor COVID-19.¹ This is an absolutely unnecessary and tragic situation.

While it's clear we're still learning about this virus, at this time the WHO website maintains this particular type of coronavirus can be transmitted from human to human. From the OIE World Organisation for Animal Health Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) webpage:²

"Are animals responsible for COVID-19 in people?"

The predominant route of transmission of COVID-19 appears to be from human to human.

Current evidence suggests that the COVID-19 virus has an animal source. Ongoing investigations are important for identifying the animal source (including species involved) and establishing the potential role of an animal reservoir in this disease. Yet, to date, there is not enough scientific evidence to identify that source or to explain the route of transmission from an animal source to humans.

Genetic sequence data reveals that the COVID-19 virus is a close relative of other CoV found circulating in Rhinolophus bat (Horseshoe Bat) populations. There is the possibility that transmission to humans involved an intermediate host.

Priorities for research to investigate the animal source were discussed by the OIE informal advisory group on COVID-19 and were presented at the WHO Global Research and Innovation Forum (11-12 February 2020) by the President of the OIE Wildlife Working Group. The outcomes from the discussion of the OIE informal advisory group on COVID-19 can be found at the link."

Pets, COVID-19, and Confirmed Infection in One Dog in Hong Kong

Also from the OIE World Organisation for Animal Health Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) webpage:³

"What do we know about COVID-19 virus and companion animals?"

The current spread of COVID-19 is a result of human to human transmission. To date, there is no evidence that companion animals can spread the disease. Therefore, there is no justification in taking measures against companion animals which may compromise their welfare.

The Veterinary Services of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China reported to OIE evidence that a dog had tested positive to the COVID-19 virus following close exposure to its owners who were sick with COVID-19 – see Immediate Notification (03/01/2020) and Follow-up report no.1 (03/08/2020).

The test, conducted by real time PCR, showed the presence of genetic material from the COVID-19 virus. The dog [a 17-year-old Pomeranian] was not showing any clinical signs of the disease.

There is no evidence that dogs play a role in the spread of this human disease or that they become sick. Further studies are needed to understand if and how different animals could be affected by COVID-19 virus. The OIE will continue to provide updates as new information becomes available.

There is no evidence to support restrictions to movement or trade of companion animals.”

According to a post on March 9th in PetfoodIndustry.com:

“Veterinarians confirmed that the coronavirus had infected the dog too after taking nasal, oral and rectal swabs, along with fecal samples. The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) published a report of the emerging disease, listing this case as the first known in dogs.

Nasal and oral samples tested positive for the presence of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the name of virus responsible for COVID-19. However, the dog hasn't shown any outward signs of illness. Follow-up oral and nasal samples taken on March 2 and 5 continues to test positive.

Doctors and veterinarians don't know if the COVID-19 virus has the potential to be zoonotic, or transmitted from dogs to people.

Doctors don't know if the dog got the virus directly from its owner, or through an intermediary species. Likewise, doctors don't know how the virus was transmitted to the dog, whether by airborne particles, direct contact or bodily fluids.

In Hong Kong, health authorities quarantine mammalian pets from households with confirmed human cases of COVID-19 and place the animals under veterinary surveillance for 14 days, according to the report.”⁴

Why Pet Parents Should NOT Hit the Panic Button

Many veterinarians have called for calm after the announcement, reminding owners this doesn't mean dogs can get sick from the virus or transmit it back to humans. Panic makes people do foolish, regrettable things, which is what has occurred in Wuhan. From a March 4th post in the Whole Dog Journal:

“Tragically, within days [of the report of the single infected dog], there were reports of a record number of dogs and other pets being abandoned in China's streets, and thousands of pets being surrendered to overwhelmed animal shelters — despite the fact that there is no indication that the COVID-19 virus is zoonotic.

Time magazine reports that the crisis for pet dogs and cats is the worst in Wuhan, the capital city of the Hubei province where the first cases of COVID-19 are believed to have emerged. Time reports that when a person in Wuhan is found to have COVID-19, the authorities kill all animals in the home as a precaution.

This report was corroborated by a reporter for the BBC (British news service):

'Volunteers in China say they're struggling to keep up with the number of animals being abandoned as the country battles the virus outbreak. More than 2,000 people in China have died and more than 78,000 infections have been reported in the country.

*Pet owners who fall sick or are caught up in quarantine can't take their animals with them, and despite reassurance from the World Health Organization that animals can't carry the virus, others are being dumped.'*⁵

The Centers for Disease Control is now advising people with COVID-19 to avoid close contact with their pets, but on February 28th, Dr. Jonathan Ball at the University of Nottingham has called the widespread panic about the news "incredibly irresponsible":

"There is no evidence that the human novel coronavirus can infect dogs and it would be incredible for a virus to make so many species jumps in such a short space of time!

We have to differentiate between real infection and just detecting the presence of a virus — these are very different — and the fact that the test result was weakly positive would suggest that this is environmental contamination or simply the presence of coronavirus shed from the human contact that has ended up in the dog's samples.

*In truth this is incredibly irresponsible because the last thing we need to do is create mass hysteria about the possibility of dogs being infected, and therefore potentially transmitting this virus when there is absolutely no evidence for this whatsoever.'*⁶

If You're a Pet Parent, Do This Instead

From the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) COVID-19 website:

"The precise meaning of the positive test result from the one dog remains unclear and further evaluation is ongoing. Hong Kong officials said that dog continues to show no clinical signs of illness, remains under quarantine and is being cared for, and will continue to be monitored and tested.

*We will keep you updated you as we learn more. **At this time, the CDC, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) say there is no evidence that companion animals, including pets, spread COVID-19.***

As always, it's a good idea to wash your hands after being around animals, and animal owners should continue to include pets and other animals in their emergency preparedness planning, including keeping a two-week supply of food and medications on hand.”⁷

If someone in your household is diagnosed with the virus and you feel additional precautions are necessary, the following is from the CDC:

“Considerations for COVID-19 patients under home care and isolation who have pets or other animals:

People with COVID-19 should be advised to tell their public health point of contact that they have pets or other animals in their home.

In addition to other prevention measures, people with COVID-19 who are identified by public health officials as requiring home care and isolation should be advised to limit interaction with pets and other animals.

Specifically, while these people are symptomatic, they should maintain separation from pets as they would with other household members, and avoid direct contact with pets, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food. Service animals should be permitted to remain with their handlers.

If possible, a household member should be designated to care for pets in the home. If the individual in home care and isolation must care for pet(s), including service animals, they should ensure they wash their hands before and after caring for pets and wear a facemask while interacting with pets, until they are medically cleared to return to normal activities.”⁸

Nature to the Rescue?

The race is on to not only learn more about how COVID-19 affects other species but for biotech companies to produce a slew of pharmaceutical products in response to this latest disease outbreak.

Interestingly, the most accessible and effective treatment may already exist at your local health food store. Dr. Michel Chrétien’s Montreal laboratory is testing quercetin, an all-natural extract from plants, and its derivatives, as a possible “broad spectrum” antiviral medication. Clinical trials began in China a few weeks ago.⁹

Dr. Mercola has also published an important article on this topic on March 9, 2020: **Essential Nutrition to Protect Yourself From Coronavirus.**

Sources and References

¹ [dvm360, February 13, 2020](#)

^{2, 3} [World Organisation for Animal Health](#)

⁴ [PetfoodIndustry.com, March 9, 2020](#)

⁵ [Whole Dog Journal, March 4, 2020](#)

⁶ [Science Media Centre, February 28, 2020](#)

⁷ [AVMA.org](#)

⁸ [CDC.gov](#)

