

COVID-19 Update for Veterinarians
May 5, 2020

SUMMARY: See this health alert for

- COVID-19 Guidance for Veterinarians
- Caring for a pet from a household where a person has suspected or confirmed COVID-19
- Testing for SARS-CoV-2
- Managing a pet that tests positive for SARS-CoV-2
- Advice for pet owners

COVID-19 Veterinarian Guidance

Portions adapted from Public Health – Seattle & King County

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause illness in people and others cause illness in certain animals. Some coronaviruses that infect animals can be spread to people, but this is rare. Note: In the context of animal health, Coronavirus (COVID-19) is referred to by its scientific name, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

- Veterinary offices should take precautions that will protect their patients, staff and pet owners from possible exposure or infection.
- Public health and animal officials are aware of a very small number of pets reported to be infected with SARS-CoV-2, mostly after close contact with people with COVID-19. More research is being done to determine how the disease is transmitted between pets and humans.
- There is no evidence at this time that pets play a significant role in the spread of COVID-19 through their skin or fur.
- Pet owners should take precautions that include safe social distancing and appropriate isolation of pets from their ill or potentially ill owners.

Requested Actions:

- Veterinary facilities should postpone elective procedures, surgeries, and non-urgent visits. Creating care plans that include curbside service, telemedicine and no-contact payment processes are highly recommended.
- Communicate your new clinical procedures and expectations with patients. Encourage them to use telemedicine whenever possible.
- Encourage staff and visitors to wear cloth face coverings when interacting with one another, both in the clinic and during curbside service.
- Coordinate with staff regarding cleaning and disinfecting procedures. Avoid sharing tools and work areas (if possible). Encourage sick staff members to stay home per health district guidelines.
- Review your clinic's PPE protocols and ensure that all staff is familiar with clinic safety guidelines. Consider reusable/washable PPE in order to avoid future shortages.
- Review and utilize biosafety and biosecurity protocols for infectious diseases. The guidelines within the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) Compendium of Veterinary Standard Precautions for Zoonotic Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel should be reviewed and followed.



Caring for a pet from a household where a person has suspected or confirmed COVID-19

- If you or your staff are providing home visits, ask if the pet has had any exposure to a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 before each visit.
- If a pet owner currently has symptoms of respiratory illness or is a confirmed COVID-19 case, they should not visit the veterinary facility. A family member or friend from outside the household may bring the animal to the clinic, but the family member or friend should avoid close contact with the ill person while picking up and dropping off the animal.
- Veterinary staff should minimize contact with infected persons by using telemedicine if possible. Clearly communicate telemedicine options to pet owners.
- Use curbside pick-up and drop-off by retrieving the animal directly from the car rather than having the owner bring the animal into the clinic. Use appropriate PPE when interacting with clients.
- Request that owners of smaller animals utilize plastic carriers and leave all non-essential items at home. Advise owners to clean carriers and bedding immediately after returning home.
- If there is an emergency with the animal, the animal should not be denied care.

Testing for SARS-CoV-2

Veterinarians are strongly encouraged to rule out more common causes of illness before testing for SARS-CoV-2, especially among pets without a COVID-19 exposure. A thorough history (including possible exposures within two weeks) should be taken. Clinical signs expected to be compatible with possible SARS-CoV-2 infection in mammalian animals may include: fever, coughing, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, lethargy, sneezing, nasal/ocular discharge, vomiting, and diarrhea. Routine testing of pets for SARS-CoV-2 is currently **not** recommended. Veterinarians who see animals that have a new, concerning illness and have been in a household with a person with COVID-19 or have had close contact to a person with COVID-19 should contact the Snohomish Health District. Also, please review the [CDC criteria for evaluation and testing pets for SARS-Cov-2](#).

Authorization for testing in Washington will be conducted on a case by case basis by approval from Washington State Department of Agriculture in coordination with the Washington State Department of Health.

Managing a pet that tests positive for SARS-CoV-2

If a specimen tests positive at a laboratory other than a USDA National Veterinary Service Laboratory (NVSL), that specimen needs to be forwarded to NVSL to confirm test results.

The CDC provides guidance for both home and veterinary facility isolation recommendations. Pets can be released from isolation when it has been **at least 72 hours since clinical signs have resolved without the use of medications AND at least 2 weeks have passed since the onset of symptoms**.

Repeat testing of pets for SARS-CoV-2 or additional testing (e.g., serology) may be coordinated with Public Health and/or WSDA.



Advice for pet owners:

- All animals carry germs. Please follow the CDC's "[Healthy Pets, Healthy People](#)" guidelines regarding proper interactions with pets.
- Owners should not let pets interact with people or animals outside the household.
- Maintain at least six feet of distance from other people or animals when walking your dogs. Avoid dog parks or public gathering places.
- Keep cats indoors when possible.
- Identify someone who can care for your pets in the event that you become ill.
- If a person inside a household becomes sick, they should be isolated from other humans and pets.
- If a pet owner is sick with COVID-19 (either suspected or confirmed by a test), CDC recommends that they restrict contact with pets as much as possible. Do not share food or bedding. Use a face covering and wash your hand before and after caring for your pet.
- Service animals should be permitted to remain with their handlers, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Additional Resources

- Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Veterinary Clinics During the COVID-19 Response: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/veterinarians.html>
- SARS-CoV-2 in animals: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/sars-cov-2-animals-including-pets>
- FAQ on Animal Testing: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/faq-public-on-companion-animal-testing.pdf
- Washington State Veterinary Medical Association: <https://wsvma.org/covid-19-resources/>
- COVID-19 and animals: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#COVID-19-and-Animals>

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