

## COVID-19 and animals: information for BC veterinarians

Updated: September 9, 2020

### **1. Can domestic animals be infected and develop illness with the virus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19 in humans?**

There have been a very small number of reports of naturally-acquired infections in animals including cats (domestic cats, lions, and tigers), dogs, and mink. Clinical illness has been noted in naturally-acquired cases in cats and farmed mink. In experimental conditions, cats, ferrets, hamsters, mink, monkeys, and rabbits have been shown to be susceptible to the disease. Caution is required in extrapolating experimental study results to natural exposure because the nature of exposure (intranasal inoculation), the very small number of experimental animals in each species, and the extent of peer-review. There have been no reports of livestock being infected with SARS-CoV-2.

### **2. What should animal owners do to if they are infected with COVID-19?**

Individuals infected with COVID-19 should limit contact with their pets and all other animals during their illness. The best option is to have another member of their household care for their animals. If an infected person must care for a pet, then they should wash their hands before and after interacting with their pet, its food and supplies. They should avoid close contact with their pet such as snuggling or letting them sleep in their bed. Veterinarians should recommend that owners restrict their animal's contact with individuals and other animals outside their home until their illness has resolved. If no one is available to care for the animal (e.g. owner is hospitalized and doesn't have a family member to care for their pet), then temporary housing at an animal shelter is recommended. Animals that need to be adopted or sent to a foster home and come from a household with a COVID-19 case should be held for 14 days at a shelter before being placed into a home. Guidelines for sheltering animals during the COVID-19 pandemic can be found here: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/interim-recommendations-intake-companion-animals-households-humans-COVID-19-are-present>

### **3. What is the evidence on the source of the virus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19 in humans?**

The current COVID-19 outbreak is driven by transmission from person to person and not from animals. Experts agree that the virus likely originated from animals, however, the definitive source has not been identified. Based on genomic evidence, it is likely that bats were the original source of the virus but the virus was then likely passed through an intermediary animal source (currently unknown) in China before being transmitted to humans.

#### **4. Can domestic animals infect people with the COVID-19 virus?**

Transmission from farmed mink to humans has been reported in the Netherlands. There have been two identified human cases (both mink farm workers) that were linked to mink cases through phylogenetic analysis and their exposure history. There have not been any other reports of cases where domestic animals have spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to people. The virus that causes COVID-19 most likely originated from an animal source in China, however, it is now spreading from person-to-person when there is direct contact (through droplets from coughing and sneezing) and not from contact with animals, with the exception of farmed mink in the Netherlands.

#### **5. Is there a test available for animals for SARS-CoV-2 in BC?**

Although, a test for SARS-CoV-2 in companion animals is now available in Canada, routine testing of animals is not recommended. The decision to test an animal in BC for SARS-CoV-2 should be made collaboratively between the attending veterinarian, the Chief Veterinarian's Office and the BC Centre for Disease Control. For further information on animal testing in BC see the BC Ministry of Agriculture website at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/animals-and-crops/animal-health>

#### **6. What should I do if a client calls me about their pet that has clinical signs consistent with a SARS-CoV-2 infection and has had contact with a person with COVID-19?**

If you have a client with an animal that has been in contact with a person with COVID-19 and the animal has signs compatible with a SARS-CoV-2 infection, you should:

1. Assess (over the phone) the severity of the illness. The animal should be seen only if warranted by the severity of its illness. An animal with mild to moderate signs can likely remain in the care of their owner or guardian with further consultation/remote monitoring;
2. Identify severe cases and treat them as any other highly contagious disease;
3. Determine the basis for contact with a COVID-19 case (self-assessed, clinical diagnosis, test positive) and level of contact with the symptomatic animal. Confirm their pet was in contact with a person that has COVID-19 within the last 14 days;
4. In limited situations the animal may be tested but the decision to test must be done in collaboration with BC's Chief Veterinarian. See provincial guidance on animal testing at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/animals-and-crops/animal-health>
5. The animal should remain isolated with the family for 14 days after the onset of its illness, and should have minimal contact with other people or other animals;

6. To ensure you are dealing with current information on transmission risk or testing of animals you can contact either Brian Radke – Deputy Chief Veterinarian, BC Ministry of Agriculture ([Brian.Radke@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Brian.Radke@gov.bc.ca), 778-666-0544 or Erin Fraser, public health veterinarian, BCCDC at ([Erin.Fraser@bccdc.ca](mailto:Erin.Fraser@bccdc.ca), 778-677-7790).

### **7. What should I do if an animal I'm treating tests positive for SARS-CoV-2?**

Follow the recommendations for testing and reporting in the testing guidance from BC's Chief Veterinarian. All testing results (non-negative, positive **and** negative) for SARS-CoV-2 must be reported to the Chief Veterinarian within 24 hours. Animals that are positive for SARS-CoV-2 and don't require hospitalization should be isolated at home with their owners for 14 days after the onset of illness. It is mostly likely that transmission to the animal was from a member of the household or another close human contact. During this period, asymptomatic household members should practice similar measures used for symptomatic household members including avoiding close contact with their symptomatic pet and washing their hands before and after interacting with their pet, its food and supplies. Contact of the pet with other animals and people should be minimized during the 14-day isolation period. Animals that are positive for SARS-CoV-2 and require hospitalization should be treated as any other highly contagious case with the use of proper biosecurity measures and personal protective equipment.

### **8. Is there a vaccination against COVID-19 that can be administered to domestic animals?**

No. Currently, there are no vaccines against COVID-19 available for animals. There is absolutely no evidence that vaccinating dogs with commercially available vaccines for other coronaviruses will provide cross-protection against COVID-19.

### **9. What is the risk of COVID-19 from imported animals? (e.g. a dog imported by a rescue organization)?**

There is no evidence that imported pets or other domestic animals can spread the virus. This situation is being monitored very closely and any new information on the risk from imported animals will be updated as it becomes available. However, importers, rescue organizations and adoptive families should avoid importing animals. If animals are imported, they should be closely monitored for signs of illness by the owner or guardian. If a recently imported pet develops a respiratory illness, the owner or guardian should contact their veterinarian by phone and inform them of the situation. Veterinarians should follow the steps listed above in question 6.

## 10. How can I protect myself and clinic staff from COVID-19?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread through direct contact with an infected person from larger liquid droplets when they cough or sneeze or when there is contact with the virus on someone's hand or on contaminated fomites. The risk of transmission to humans from an infected animal has been assessed by a panel of Canadian experts as low.

Follow the same advice that public health officials recommend to prevent COVID-19 transmission:

- wash your hands before and after touching an at-risk animal or their food/supplies, and after cleaning up after them;
- wear protective outerwear to prevent contamination of your clothes;
- avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands;
- regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces;
- follow physical distancing recommendations;
- avoid others who are unwell; and
- stay home when you are sick.

Stay informed of COVID-19 risk in your community. BC information is posted on the BCCDC's website at: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>

Follow all orders of BC's Provincial Health Officer, guidelines of WorkSafeBC, and recommendations of the College of Veterinarians of BC and ensure your practice is doing everything possible to minimize transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

**If you have COVID-19, or think you might have it, prevent its spread by following the instructions from BCCDC:** <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/if-you-are-sick>

## 11. Who can I contact in BC for more information on COVID-19 and animals?

Erin Fraser – Public health veterinarian, BC Centre for Disease Control  
[Erin.Fraser@bccdc.ca](mailto:Erin.Fraser@bccdc.ca) or 778-677-7790

Brian Radke – Public health veterinarian, BC Ministry of Agriculture  
[Brian.Radke@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Brian.Radke@gov.bc.ca) or 778-666-0544



BC Centre for Disease Control



Ministry of  
Agriculture

**Resources:**

BC Centre for Disease Control: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>

College of Veterinarians of BC: <https://www.cvbc.ca/resources/useful-links/>

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association: <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/coronavirus-covid-19>

OIE (World Organization for Animal Health): <https://www.oie.int/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019-novel-coronavirus/>

Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

WorkSafeBC: <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates>