

Coronaviruses and pets

The human coronavirus (COVID-19) is in the news a lot these days, and some reports are based on fact, others speculation. We don't have all the answers, but as a pet owner – or someone who spends a lot of time around pets – here's what you should know:

- **Follow current COVID-19 health official recommendations** from the World Health Organization (WHO) and U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).
- Based on what we know now, and what is known about other coronaviruses, **there is limited evidence to support risk of COVID-19 to your pet – and no evidence that you are at risk from your pet.**
- **A dog in Hong Kong reportedly tested “weakly positive” for COVID-19 coronavirus, but its blood test was negative for COVID-19.** The important things to remember are:
 - » **This dog appears to be healthy – it is not showing any signs of illness;** this dog was tested because its owner is a confirmed case.
 - » Although the investigation continues, the relevance of this “low-level infection” remains unknown – **there is currently no evidence that dogs can be a source of coronavirus infection to humans or other animals.**
- **Testing pets for COVID-19 is unwarranted** at this time, given there is no indication that apparently healthy and unexposed pets should be tested for the human virus. In an abundance of caution, however, keep pets away from infected people, and confine pets of infected people.
- **Regardless, we suggest you always follow good handwashing and hygiene practices, especially before and after interacting with pets.** Avoid contact with wildlife, including those kept as pets. Routinely clean and disinfect animal contact surfaces like cages and feeding areas, as well as immediately after contact with high-risk animals, such as wildlife and stray or free-roaming dogs and cats.
- **Keep pets away from people infected with the COVID-19 virus, and confine pets of infected people to limit spread.** Why? Because it's not yet known whether pets – while still appearing healthy – may carry the virus, and health officials are being cautious. We simply don't understand enough about COVID-19 to say there is no risk at this stage.
- **If your pet shows signs of coughing, sneezing, lethargy or otherwise, call your veterinarian at the first sign of illness,** and keep them indoors as a precautionary measure. Signs of illness in dogs and cats are usually associated with various common viral and bacterial infections (kennel cough, canine flu, etc.) that are not transmissible to people.

Frequently asked questions

Are dogs and cats at risk of contracting the virus that causes COVID-19?

Based on what we know now, and what is known about other coronaviruses, there is limited evidence to support risk of COVID-19 to your pet – and no evidence that you are at risk from your pet.

Research and testing are ongoing, and much remains unknown, so it's critical to follow current health official recommendations as this situation evolves. You can get the latest information from reputable sources such as:

- World Small Animal Veterinary Association: [Coronavirus and Companion Animals Advice](#)
- World Organization for Animal Health (OIE): [Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [About Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

But what about the dog in Hong Kong?

According to the latest reports from the Hong Kong SAR Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, **the dog's blood test was negative for COVID-19**. They are keeping the dog for further evaluation and safety as more is learned about the virus, but the important things to remember are:

- This dog appears to be healthy – it is not showing any signs of illness; and
- Although the investigation continues, the relevance of this “low-level infection” remains unknown – there is currently no evidence that dogs can be a source of coronavirus infection to humans or other animals.

Although there isn't evidence that pets can transmit the virus to humans, why are some health officials recommending infected people quarantine themselves from people and pets? Because it's not yet known whether pets – while still appearing healthy – may carry the virus, and health officials are being cautious. We simply don't understand enough about COVID-19 to say there is no risk at this stage.

What can I do with what I know now?

Stay informed, stay calm and enjoy your quality time with your family and pet! In addition to following public health officials' recommendations, there are some general steps you should take as a pet owner:

- Wash your hands before and after interacting with your pet.
- Avoid contact with wildlife, including those kept as pets.
- Routinely clean and disinfect animal contact surfaces like cages and feeding areas, as well as immediately after contact with high-risk animals like wildlife and stray or free-roaming dogs and cats.

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How can I protect my pet from exposure to the COVID-19 virus?

While there is limited evidence to support risk of COVID-19 virus to your pet, we recommend the following precautions regardless:

- Wash hands after handling animals or their environment; supervise handwashing for children less than five years of age.
- Keep pets away from people confirmed to have COVID-19, and confine pets of infected people to limit potential spread.
- Protect your skin from direct contact with animal feces by wearing vinyl or household cleaning gloves or using a plastic bag when cleaning up after a pet.
- Promptly wash bites and scratches inflicted by animals.
- Do not allow pets to lick open wounds, cuts, medical devices or the faces of young children and immunocompromised people.
- Avoid contact with wildlife kept as pets, consumed as food and in the environment, and walk pets on a leash outdoors to prevent contact with wildlife.
- Routinely clean and disinfect animal contact surfaces (e.g., cages, feeding areas) and immediately after contact with high-risk species (such as wildlife or free-roaming or stray dogs and cats) or raw animal-based food items.
- Help ensure your pets remain healthy with regular veterinary visits and preventive care, including steps to control and prevent parasites, and seek veterinary care at the first sign of illness in your pet.

Should my pet wear a mask?

No. There's no scientific evidence that face masks protect pets from infectious diseases or air pollutants, and masks have the potential to be unnecessarily scary or uncomfortable for pets.

Should I get my pet tested for COVID-19?

At this time, testing pets for COVID-19 virus is unwarranted, as there is currently no indication that apparently healthy and unexposed pets should be tested for the virus. We are awaiting the results of the Hong Kong investigation to better understand whether there is any risk of virus to and from our pets.

What if my pet's not feeling well or is showing signs of flu-like illness?

If your pet shows any signs of illness, such as coughing, sneezing or lethargy, call your veterinarian immediately, and keep them indoors to prevent further spread. Signs of illness in dogs and cats are usually associated with various common viral and bacterial infections (kennel cough, canine flu, etc.) that are neither coronaviruses nor transmissible to people.

If you're a Banfield Optimum Wellness Plan client, you can connect with a veterinarian anytime, day or night, via our telehealth service [Vet Chat™](#) on the Banfield app.

What if I'm not feeling well, recently visited a high-risk area and/or am quarantined due to potential COVID-19 virus exposure, but my pet still needs medical attention?

If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms or are quarantined due to potential coronavirus exposure, stay home and call your medical provider for advice on next steps.

If your pet does not require immediate veterinary care, keep them at home and avoid contact with other people and animals; we'll be happy to help you reschedule any appointments for your pet until you're well. If you're a Banfield Optimum Wellness Plan client, you can connect with a veterinarian anytime, day or night via [Vet Chat™](#) through the Banfield app. With 24/7 on-demand access to general pet care advice and triage support from a reputable source, Vet Chat can help you determine whether it's time for a trip to the veterinarian.

If your pet needs to be seen urgently due to a life-threatening situation or illness:

1. Call to confirm your veterinary clinic is equipped to treat patients that could have been exposed to COVID-19 virus and has adequate isolation facilities and staffing to care for your pet. While there is limited evidence that pets can be infected and no evidence that they pose a risk to others, this is purely a precaution because the virus is not well-understood.
2. If your veterinary clinic is unable to provide full isolation and associated care for your pet, ask for a referral to the nearest veterinary clinic with ICU or isolation capacity.
3. Arrange for an unexposed/non-quarantined friend or family member to transport your pet to and from the veterinary clinic to limit potential exposure.

What is known about other coronaviruses in cats and dogs?

While there's still no evidence to support risk of COVID-19 virus infection) to dogs or cats, there are other coronaviruses that do impact pets, none of which are transmissible to people:

- Cats: Feline enteric coronavirus (FCoV) causes a mild or asymptomatic infection in domestic cats, and most signs are gastrointestinal-related. The widespread virus is more common in areas of higher cat numbers (catteries, shelters).
- Dogs: Two known coronaviruses exist in dogs. The gastrointestinal form can range from asymptomatic or mild diarrhea to severe debilitating inflammation of the small intestine, which in puppies, will occasionally result in death. Most dogs have a mild disease consisting of cough, sneezing, and nasal discharge.

What is the treatment for coronaviruses in pets?

There is no specific treatment for coronaviruses in dogs or cats, as mild clinical signs are unlikely to require therapy. Supportive care, including replacement of lost fluids, nutritional support, and anti-nausea medication, may be used for more severe cases. Hospitalization is rarely necessary. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses and therefore will not help treat coronaviruses.

Can manufactured pet food carry COVID-19 virus?

It is highly unlikely that dry or canned pet foods are potential viral vectors.