

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

March 11, 2020

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

Yes. However, there has only been a single case in a dog in Hong Kong that tested weakly positive for the virus. The dog did not show any signs of illness so it remains unclear if the virus is not pathogenic to dogs in general or whether this particular animal did not develop clinical signs. The animal was put under a 14-day quarantine and monitored closely for signs of illness by Hong Kong's Agriculture, Fisheries, and Conservation Department.

### **2. Can domestic animals develop clinical illness with COVID-19?**

There is currently no evidence that domestic animals, including dogs and cats, develop clinical illness with this new coronavirus. A pet dog in Hong Kong tested positive for the virus but did not show any signs of illness. This animal was from a household with a person infected with COVID-19.

### **3. 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. 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; and the animal should not be exposed to other people.

### **4. 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 associated with 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.

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

It is unlikely. There is no evidence that domestic animals can 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.

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

No. There is currently no test for animals available for SARS-CoV-2 in BC. The overall risk of transmission of the virus from human cases to animals remains extremely low to negligible in BC. However, discussions are underway at the provincial and national level to develop contingency plans for animal testing should the need arise. This situation will be monitored closely and any new information on the need and pathways for animal testing will be shared with the BC veterinary community.

#### **7. What should I do if a client calls me about their pet that has a respiratory illness and was around a person with COVID-19?**

Currently, there is no evidence that domestic animals develop clinical illness after exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. To date in BC, there are a small number of human cases with limited community contacts so the overall human risk in BC remains low. Therefore, the likelihood of a pet being exposed to person with COVID-19 remains extremely low in BC at this time. However, if you have a client with a pet with signs of a respiratory illness that has been in contact with a person with COVID-19, you should:

1. Confirm their pet was in contact with a person that has a confirmed COVID-19 case;
2. Assess (over the phone) the severity of the illness. An animal with mild to moderate signs can remain in the care of their owner or guardian;
3. Identify severe cases and treat them as any other highly contagious disease;
4. To insure you are dealing with current information on testing of animals or transmission risks you can contact either Erin Fraser, public health veterinarian, BCCDC at ([Erin.Fraser@bccdc.ca](mailto:Erin.Fraser@bccdc.ca), 778-677-7790) or Brian Radke – public health veterinarian, BC Ministry of Agriculture ([Brian.Radke@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Brian.Radke@gov.bc.ca), 778-666-0544)

#### **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, until we know more, importers, rescue organizations and adoptive families should avoid importing animals from areas where COVID-19 is circulating. If animals are imported from affected areas, they should be closely monitored for signs of illness by the owner or guardian. If a dog recently imported from an affected area 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 7. The most affected countries are listed by the Public Health Agency of Canada here:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/covid-19-affected-areas-list.html>

### 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.

Follow the same advice that public health officials recommend for the cold and flu season:

- wash your hands often with soap and water;
- cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing;
- 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/coronavirus-\(novel\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel))

Ask clients with a recent travel history to affected areas to refrain from visiting the clinic within 14 days of their return. If they have a critically ill animal, this should be discussed with the clinic ahead of them attending the facility to minimize the risk of disease transmission.

See Canada's list of COVID-19 affected areas: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/covid-19-affected-areas-list.html>

The most important thing you can do to prevent coronavirus and other illnesses is to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face. Cover your mouth when you cough so you're not exposing other people. If you are sick yourself, stay away from others. **If you are ill and have been**

**in an area where there is COVID-19 transmission, contact your health care provider and 8-1-1 for advice.**

**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

**Resources:**

BC Centre for Disease Control: [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-\(novel\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel))

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

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