



## **April 28, 2020 Guidance for B.C. Veterinarians on Testing of Animals for SARS-CoV-2**

### ***Context***

Testing of animals for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the cause of COVID-19 in humans, is available in Canada. This document provides information and guidance to veterinarians on considerations for testing, the process of testing and the reporting requirements for test results. These recommendations will be updated as necessitated by the continually evolving information about the virus.

Against the global back drop of over 3 million confirmed human cases of COVID-19, a handful of animals have been detected as having been naturally infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and all are thought to have been infected through close contact with infected humans. During the human pandemic, increased disease associated with SARS-CoV-2 virus has not been noted at a population level in animals. There is currently no evidence that pets or other domestic animals play a significant role in the spread of COVID-19. Aside from the presumptive initial incursion from wildlife in China, no instances of animals transmitting the virus to humans have been detected.

For more information about the science of animal infection with SARS-CoV-2, the SYREAF “living” systematic rapid review of the evidence of infection in, and potential fomite transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from pets and livestock is available at <http://www.syreaf.org/>.

The BC Centre for Disease Control’s COVID-19 and animals: information for veterinarians document is available at <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/pets>.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has information on animal health, including livestock information, and COVID-19 at <https://www.inspection.gc.ca/covid-19/information-for-consumers-about-food-safety-and-an/eng/1584648921808/1584648922156#q2>.

The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) hosts a Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) at <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>.

## ***Routine testing of animals<sup>1</sup> for SARS-CoV-2 is not recommended at this time***

### ***Rationale:***

- Public health testing must be the priority to protect human health and prevent and slow the rate of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in humans.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is being driven by person to person transmission with current evidence and expert opinion suggesting that the risk for human infection through animal contact remains low.
- In the event that a human transmitted the virus to an animal, the human, not the animal, poses the greatest risk of infecting other humans.
- Sampling and testing animals for SARS-CoV-2 may consume the personal protective equipment and supplies needed for sampling and testing in people.
- In general, test results will not change the clinical management of the animal or change the recommended measures to manage the potential risks if an animal tests positive.
- The mere act of testing, much less a positive test result, risks stigmatizing an animal, or more broadly the entire species of animal. Such stigmatization risks damaging the human-animal bond or threatening animal welfare.
- The test performance (e.g., sensitivity and specificity) on animal samples is unknown.

### ***Criteria for Testing Consideration***

Consistent with the direction provided by North American animal and public health authorities, testing decisions should be made collaboratively between the attending veterinarian, the Chief Veterinarian's Office and the BC Centre for Disease Control.

Consistent with North American animal and public health authorities, and in consultation with the BC Centre for Disease control, testing of animals for SARS-CoV-2 will be limited to the following situations:

- An animal has clinical signs consistent with SARS-CoV-2 infection AND
  - common causes of the animal's clinical signs have been ruled out with appropriate laboratory testing; AND
  - the animal has had close and substantial contact with a person suspected or confirmed with COVID-19; AND
  - onset of the animal's clinical signs occurred within 14 days of the person's clinical signs.
- In specific circumstances, an asymptomatic animal that could have been exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus may be tested if it is:
  - part of a cluster of animals showing compatible clinical signs OR
  - part of an endangered species OR
  - in a special situation such as therapy animals that are in close contact with vulnerable people or settings.

<sup>1</sup> Includes companion and zoo animals, horses, livestock, poultry and wildlife.

## ***Criteria for Testing Consideration (cont.)***

- Testing is part of an approved research project gathering scientific information to better understand if and how animals might be affected by SARS-CoV-2 and help clarify the role, if any, of pets in human COVID-19. Approved animal care and use of biosafety protocols are required.
- Testing will inform disease control activities (e.g., handling, care or isolation of animals that may need relocation and have had close and substantial contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19).
- Testing of symptomatic wildlife is requested by the provincial Wildlife Veterinarian.
- Testing is requested by public health authorities for the purpose of public health action.
- **Any potential** livestock testing must **first** be discussed with the Chief Veterinarian and federal authorities, due to the potential for international trade implications.

## ***Testing Process***

Prior to testing, a management plan should be developed in the event of a positive test result (e.g., clinical management, client communication, etc.). Typically, a positive pet would be expected to return to its household and isolate with any infected members of the household until recovered. This isolation will reduce the risk of transmission to uninfected household members including people and animals. Dr Erin Fraser, BCCDC Public Health Veterinarian (erin.fraser@bccdc.ca, 778-677-7790) or I can be contacted for assistance with developing a management plan.

Testing of animals may represent a human health risk to the person collecting the sample through lack of human physical distancing and the act of sample collection. Collecting samples from animals should be performed in accordance with public health guidance for mitigating disease transmission risks. For more information, refer to the BCCDC document mentioned on page 1.

Veterinarians should comply with the veterinary diagnostic laboratory's instructions on sample collection and submission.

As SARS-CoV-2 in animals is an OIE immediately notifiable disease, positive laboratory tests are deemed non-negative (also known as, suspect positive) until confirmed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's National Centre for Foreign Animal Diseases. Non-negative results should not be publicly communicated.

Any communication to the client should identify the test result as non-negative (i.e., suspect positive) and explain the requirement for federal confirmatory testing.

## ***Reporting Requirements***

All testing results (non-negative, positive **and** negative) for SARS-CoV-2 must be reported to the Chief Veterinarian under section 20(3)(d) of the *Animal Health Act* and sections 10(3)(a) and (b) of Appendix 1 of the Reportable and Notifiable Diseases Regulation.

Please see the attached Annex for the Pan-Canadian agreed to reporting elements which must be submitted to the Chief Veterinarian for each case that is tested.

**The veterinarian submitting samples for SARS-CoV-2 testing is ultimately responsible for reporting all test results and required information to the Chief Veterinarian within 24 hours.**

The Chief Veterinarian will forward positive reports and associated required information to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for reporting to the OIE. In addition, the Chief Veterinarian will report any positive cases to the local health authority.

For more information about these recommendations, or to discuss testing or a management plan, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Brian R. Radke DVM PhD  
Deputy Chief Veterinarian

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## Annex

### Pan-Canadian reportable information required for SARS-CoV-2 animal testing

#### Veterinarian information

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Veterinary Practitioner's Name                     |   |
| Practitioner's Municipality                        |   |
| Practitioner's Telephone Number                    |   |
| Province   |   |
| Provincial/Territorial CVO has recommended testing | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> No |

#### Animal location information

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Municipality (where animal is located)   |   |
| Postal Code (where animal is located)  |   |
| Owner has been informed that results and non-identifying information will be shared with provincial, territorial and federal authorities and may be reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> No |

## Animal information

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Animal identification (name, id number)       |  |
| Specimen submitted                            |  |
| Animal Species                                |  |
| Animal Type (companion, zoo, backyard, other) |  |
| Breed   |  |
| Gender  |  |
| Age   |  |
| Reason for Testing                            |  |
| Presence of clinical signs                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> No<br><input type="checkbox"/> Unknown  |
| If yes, indicate clinical signs               |  |
| Date of onset of clinical signs               |  |
| Who collected the sample?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Veterinarian<br><input type="checkbox"/> Animal Health Technician<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) |
| Date sample collected                         |  |

### Laboratory submission information

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Laboratory                      |  |
| Date specimen received          |  |
| Date of diagnosis / test        |  |
| Lab Reference Number            |  |
| Testing method                  |  |
| Test result                     |  |
| Laboratory contact name         |  |
| Laboratory contact phone number |  |

### Additional epidemiological information

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Does the animal being tested spend time outside without supervision? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> No<br><input type="checkbox"/> Unknown |
| Other animals in household   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> No<br><input type="checkbox"/> Unknown |
| List species and number of animals                                   |   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Indicate if other animals display clinical signs and dates of onset.  |   |
| Humans in household affected by COVID   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> No<br><input type="checkbox"/> Unknown |
| Was the animal exposed to a person with a positive COVID-19 test?   |   |
| Was the animal exposed to a person with a clinical diagnosis of COVID-19 by a health care professional?   |   |
| Was the animal exposed to a person with self-assessed symptoms of COVID-19 infection?   |   |
| Date of symptom onset for person tested, clinically diagnosed or self-assessed as COVID-19 positive.  |   |
| Symptoms of person tested, clinically diagnosed or self-assessed as COVID-19 positive.  |   |
| Nature of the relationship between the animal and the person tested, clinically diagnosed or self-assessed as COVID-19 positive (for example, member of the same household, visitor to the household, etc.) |   |