

Your pets & the COVID-19 pandemic: Your questions answered. Updated.

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The **COVID-19 disease** was caused by the SARS-CoV-2 novel coronavirus and it was declared a pandemic by the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** on 11 March 2020. It has now spread to all continents. Amidst widespread uncertainty it has also become clear that there are certain misconceptions and misperceptions with regard to the pandemic and companion animals, more specifically pet dogs and cats. Below we answer the possible questions you may have.

Question: Can you get the coronavirus from your dog or cat?

Answer: No. The virus causing COVID-19 is spread from human to human mainly through droplets deriving from sneezing and coughing. Currently there is **NO evidence** to suggest that pets can be a source of infection. As a result you do not have to fear that your pet can make you sick. As always, after playing or handling your furry loved ones, we recommend that you practice good hygiene and wash your hands with soap and water. If you would like more information you can refer to the Q&A session presented by the **World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)**, who are the animal equivalent of the WHO. You may have heard of the ** pet dog in Hong Kong, who was in the same premises as his owner who had contracted COVID-19, that tested as a “weak positive”. While the animal did test positive, the levels were so low, it was deemed very unlikely that the dog could shed enough virus to infect a person (Read more about the case here <http://bit.ly/2xOD69v>).

UPDATED NOTE on this case: The **World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA)** has moved to reassure pet owners following the news that this dog in Hong Kong, quarantined after it had originally tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, has died. The dog had been released after two weeks of quarantine having subsequently tested negative for the virus.

The dog, a 17-year-old Pomeranian, had shown no clinical signs of COVID-19. However, it did have significant unrelated health problems including cardiac and renal issues and is believed to have passed away from these and old age, possibly exacerbated by the stress of quarantine away from familiar surroundings. The WSAVA confirms that there is no evidence that the dog contracted COVID-19, nor that it could have passed the viral cause to another human or animal. [Read more here.](#)

Question: Can the COVID-19 disease (caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2), infect pets and make them sick?

Answer: Yes, but it is highly unlikely. COVID-19 is almost exclusively spread from person to person. However, to date there has been one report of a cat becoming sick in Belgium. A week after the owner was sick, the cat developed mild symptoms of diarrhoea, vomiting and coughing and it tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 ([Read more about the case here](#)). This is the only case to date where a pet has developed disease from possibly getting the virus from a human. Currently, there is **no evidence** that dogs can become sick from SARS-CoV-2. Even the one pet dog in Hong Kong which tested as a “weak positive” never became ill after many weeks of observation ([Read more about the case here](#)). Interestingly, a tiger from the Bronx Zoo in New York which developed mild disease (it and other tigers and lions stopped eating and were coughing) tested positive for the virus ([Read more about the case here](#)). So there is a possibility that pets and other animals, especially from the cat family, can become infected by the virus and develop disease. However, considering that millions of animals have been in contact with sick humans with very few animals developing disease, it is highly unlikely that your pet will be infected and become sick from this

virus. **More importantly, currently there is no evidence that pets can spread the virus to humans.**

Question: What precautionary measures should be taken by owners when companion or other animals have close contact with humans sick or suspected with COVID-19?

Answer: Currently, there is only one report where a companion animal has been suspected of becoming sick from the COVID-19 virus (see above). As a result, if you do become ill, you need to practice good hygiene (as always recommended) and isolate yourself from other humans and pets for two weeks. If you do become ill it would be advisable to have a member of your household care for your pet until you are well enough to take over. Also, since pets can get sick with their own illness and may need veterinary attention, having someone to take them to the vet will be helpful. Lastly animals and people can sometimes share diseases (zoonotic diseases) so limiting contact with your pet when you are ill, with any disease, is always a good practice (**Source:** Website of the World Organization for Animal Health or OIE 2020).

Question: How are our veterinary practices ensuring they care for as many patients as possible?

Answer: If your pet needs attention, we still recommend that they go to the veterinarian. However, since your vet can also be infected with the COVID-19 virus, you will notice that they will have tightened up biosecurity measures. As a first step, call in and check if your pet can't wait until a more convenient date or if it is an illness of immediate concern. When heading to the practice limit the trip to just yourself and your pet, as the fewer persons in one place the safer for you and other owners coming in with their pet. If you are sick or in self-isolation please don't take your pet to the vet yourself.

Above all, please remember to wash or disinfect your hands at the practice. At the end of the day, your local vet is there to help but we also do need them to stay healthy so that all pets in need can be attended to.

[Additional reading from Science Mag News](#)

[Additional reading from Science Mag News 2](#)

Note: If needed, the information provided here will be updated. This post was compiled from, among others, official information made available by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and against the background of information made available by the South African Veterinary Council (SAVC).

- Author Compiled by CvB/FVS

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