

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 no evidence that dogs or cats in a domestic environment can be a source of COVID-19 infection to humans or other animals – and limited evidence to support risk of the virus to pets.**
- However, **any surface with which a person infected with COVID-19 comes into contact may transfer the virus or viral RNA**, including pet fur or nasal secretions. As such, it is advised to keep pets away from infected people, and to confine pets of infected people.
- **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.
- **If your pet shows signs of respiratory illness (coughing, sneezing, lethargy or otherwise), call your veterinarian at the first sign of illness**, and keep them isolated from other pets as a precautionary measure. Signs of illness in dogs and cats are usually associated with various viral and bacterial infections (kennel cough, canine flu, etc.) that are neither coronaviruses nor transmissible to people. •
- At this time, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA), American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and other **human and veterinary health organizations do not recommend routine testing of pets for SARS-CoV-2**, the virus that causes COVID-19 in humans.
- **Stay apprised of 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 \(COVID-19\)](#)

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 no evidence that domestic dogs or cats can be a source of COVID-19 infection to humans or other animals. There is limited evidence to support risk of the virus to pets, and testing pets remains unwarranted. In an abundance of caution, however, it is advised to keep pets away from infected people, and to confine pets of infected people.

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 reports I'm hearing of pet dogs and cats (even lions and tigers!) infected with COVID-19?

A small number of pets belonging to people infected with COVID-19 and several big cats at New York's Bronx Zoo have been tested and confirmed positive for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 in humans. However, only a few of the animals reported positive showed signs of illness.

SARS-CoV-2 virus is a human virus, and the largest known transmission risk (at this time) is between people, *not* between pets or from people to pets. There is limited evidence to support risk of the virus to pets, and routine testing of pets is not recommended at this time.

In an abundance of caution, however, it is advised to keep pets away from infected people and to confine pets of infected people. Any surface with which a person infected with COVID-19 comes into contact may transfer the virus or viral RNA, including pet fur or nasal secretions. As such, good hand and respiratory hygiene should be practiced when handling pets.

Do pets that positive for SARS-CoV-2 display similar signs of illness as humans?

In the limited confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 in domestic dogs and cats, there have been reports of minor respiratory symptoms, and all are expected to make a full recovery.

While there is still limited evidence that pets can be a source of infection to other animals or humans in a domestic environment, our current understanding is that cats have similar receptors to humans for SARS-CoV-2. Like humans, cats may have differing responses to viral exposure, with some more susceptible than others.

In an abundance of caution it is advised to keep pets away from infected people, and to confine pets of infected people.

Do social distancing best practices apply to pets?

The [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\)](#) advises people to apply social distancing measures to their pets, including walking dogs on a leash at least six feet away from other people and pets and avoiding public places like dog parks where large numbers of people and dogs gather. We continue to encourage pet owners to follow current COVID-19 health official recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC); this includes keeping pets away from infected people and confining pets of infected people.

Why does information about COVID-19 keep changing?

COVID-19 is a newly emerging disease, and the situation is still evolving. We are learning more about the disease COVID-19 and the SARS-CoV-2 virus every day.

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 preventive care, including steps to control and prevent parasites. Call your veterinarian at the first sign of illness in your pet.

Is there a COVID-19 vaccine for cats and dogs?

There is no COVID-19 vaccine for pets at this time.

What should I do if my pet missed its core vaccines due to COVID-19?

Connect with your veterinarian as they can advise on the best course of action for your pet's specific circumstances. Although keeping your pet up to date on vaccines is important, your veterinarian can help determine the urgency of your situation while keeping the health, safety and wellbeing of you and your pet top of mind.

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.

If pet fur can carry the virus, does that mean I should clean or wipe my pets down with bleach/alcohol/Clorox/Lysol, etc.?

No. While it's easy to disinfect a doorknob or countertop with disinfectant wipes, alcohol or bleach, all of these things could harm your pet. There is currently no evidence to support additional bathing of pets as a result of COVID-19. When you do bathe your pet, always use a mild shampoo specifically formulated for pets and lots of water to avoid causing skin problems with harsher soaps or shampoos.

Should I get my pet tested for COVID-19?

At this time, the CDC, USDA, AVMA and other human and veterinary health organizations do not recommend routine testing of animals for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 in humans. In an abundance of caution, however, it is advised to keep pets away from infected people and to confine pets of infected people.

Currently, there is no evidence of an increased risk of virus transmission from exposed pets to people. As our understanding of the role of virus transmission from exposed dogs and cats advances, our recommendations for routine testing will be adjusted as necessary.

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

If your pet shows signs of respiratory illness (coughing, sneezing, lethargy or otherwise), call your veterinarian at the first sign of illness, and keep them isolated from other pets as a precautionary measure. Signs of illness in dogs and cats are usually associated with various 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 and [banfield.com](#).

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 staffing to care for your pet. While there is limited evidence that pets can be infected and no evidence that domestic dogs and cats 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 the care your pet needs, 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.

Should I get rid of my pet(s) to be sure they will not transfer the virus to my family?

No. Currently there is no evidence that domestic dogs or cats can be a source of infection to humans or other animals. Pet ownership can have health, emotional and social benefits, so following responsible pet keeping and hygienic practices are recommended to keep families and pets together and free from disease.

SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, is a human virus, and the largest known transmission risk (at this time) is between people, not from people to pets. However, people who test positive for COVID-19 should be isolated from other people and pets, per World Health Organization recommendations. People should also continue to practice good hygiene – especially thorough handwashing – before and after interacting with pets.

What is known about other coronaviruses in cats and dogs?

While there's still limited 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.

What should I do if my pet missed its core vaccines due to COVID-19?

Connect with your veterinarian as they can advise on the best course of action for your pet's specific circumstances. Although keeping your pet up-to-date on vaccines is important, your veterinarian can help determine the urgency of your situation while keeping the health, safety and wellbeing of you and your pet top of mind.