

# Can people give their pets COVID-19?

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Millions of people across the country are living under stay-at-home orders, which often means prolonged contact with their pets. With a tiger at the Bronx Zoo recently testing positive for COVID-19, the question of whether people can transmit the disease to their pets is becoming more important.

Nasser Yazdani, an assistant teaching professor in the Department of Public Health at the University of Missouri, answers some common questions below about the transmissibility of COVID-19 from people to their pets.

## **Can pets contract COVID-19? What are their symptoms?**

Certain pets can get COVID-19, though it is rare. There have been a few documented cases of pets contracting the disease from their owners outside of the United States. Here in the U.S., a tiger at the Bronx Zoo in New York was the first confirmed case of COVID-19 among animals that were likely infected by humans. In this case, the tiger seems to have contracted the novel coronavirus from an infected zookeeper who was asymptomatic. The tiger began to wheeze and developed a dry cough, although it is too early to determine if that was a direct result of COVID-19 or could be attributed to something else.

Emerging research from China also has found that COVID-19 develops poorly in dogs and does not appear to demonstrate visible symptoms. Cats and ferrets, however, are at a greater risk of developing the disease, which develops well in both species. Cats who develop the disease may display respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms, such as vomiting or diarrhea. They also can go on to infect other healthy cats.

## **If I have COVID-19, is it possible to transmit the disease to my pet? If so, are there recommendations to minimize this possibility?**

It is possible for a person to transmit COVID-19 to a pet, although there are only a few confirmed cases at this time. Several pet cats and dogs have tested positive in Hong Kong and Belgium. However, with the

exception of one cat that showed clinical symptoms, the pets were only tested because their owners tested positive for COVID-19.

According to CDC guidelines, certain precautions should be undertaken when a [pet owner](#) is confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19. If individuals develop the disease, it is recommended that they restrict interactions with animals just as they would with other people. If it is not possible for someone else to care for the pet while the owner recovers—or if the pet is a service animal—it is recommended to avoid close contact (e.g. kissing, snuggling, sharing food or bedding) and wash hands before and after contact with the animal. Cat owners should keep their cats indoors for the time being. Pets also should always be leashed when walking outside, and crowded places should be avoided.

Finally, if an owner is sick and believes the pet is also getting sick, the owner should refrain from going to the vet and instead have others take the pet to the clinic. Many vet clinics also are practicing a "paws only" policy in which only pets are allowed inside, so owners should let the clinic know in advance they are coming.

## **What is the process for testing animals for COVID-19, and when should this be done?**

It is important to note that all the aforementioned pets with confirmed COVID-19 were only tested because of their close proximity to a person who tested positive for COVID-19. Depending on the species and the resources available, animals have had nasal, throat, and rectal swabs taken and analyzed to check for the virus.

Currently, it is not believed that pets and service animals pose much risk of COVID-19 transmission to humans. As is the case for people, [animals](#) should continue to receive routine care. In order to maintain social

distancing measures, [owners](#) should consult with veterinarians by phone to decide if the animal should be seen in person. COVID-19 testing is not recommended at this time unless an animal is displaying new health issues that cannot be otherwise explained and has had prolonged contact with someone who has COVID-19. In this case, the veterinarian will work with state health officials to arrange for testing if necessary.

Provided by University of Missouri

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