

# COVID-19 can affect pets

July 28 2020, by Kay Ledbetter

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Social distancing applies to pets as well as humans in households with positive cases of COVID-19. Confirmed cases of pets infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, are being reported across the U.S.

"We do need to talk about our pets," said Susan Culp, DVM, Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service veterinarian in the Institute for Infectious Animal Diseases. "If you do have a human in a home that is diagnosed positive, in addition to isolating from other people, they need to isolate from their pets."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, recommends avoiding contact with your pet including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, sharing food and sleeping in the same bed. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wear a cloth face covering and wash your hands before and after you interact with them.

## **Positive-testing animals with COVID-19**

Texas Animal Health Commission, TAHC, reported a dog in Tarrant County was confirmed to be infected with SARS-CoV-2 on July 7. The case was confirmed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Veterinary Services Laboratories.

Although the dog from Tarrant County was tested through a private veterinary diagnostic laboratory, the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory, TVMDL, also performs testing for SARS-CoV-2.

TVMDL began testing for SARS-CoV-2 in April and works with the Texas Department of State Health Services, DSHS, and TAHC. Currently, animals can only be tested with approval from the DSHS state public health veterinarian and the TAHC state veterinarian.

TAHC, TVMDL and DSHS work together using a "one health" approach by providing guidance in accordance with CDC.

While that was the first confirmed animal detection in Texas, there have

more than 20 diagnosed cases in the U.S., according to USDA, which states, "We are still learning about the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19 in people, but it appears that it can spread from people to animals in some situations."

A small number of animals worldwide have been reported to be infected with SARS-CoV-2, mostly after close contact with people with COVID-19. Culp said according to the CDC, the risk of a positive-testing animal spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low.

"Based on current knowledge, there is no evidence that pets play a significant role in spreading SARS-CoV-2 to people," said Andy Schwartz, DVM, TAHC state veterinarian. "It's always important to restrict contact with your pets and other animals, just like you would other people, if you are infected with COVID-19 in order to protect them from infection."

"It's also important that any animal suspected of possibly being infected with SARS-CoV-2 also be evaluated for the other common causes of respiratory or [gastrointestinal symptoms](#)," said Bruce Akey, DVM, director of TVMDL, adding TVMDL can provide an array of testing for these more common, and more likely, causes of illness in the animal, as well.

Culp explained that coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, and animals can have their own coronaviruses. Some coronaviruses can cause respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses in some animals.

The chances are very low that the human can spread it to the animal, but it can happen, Culp said. She said people diagnosed with COVID-19 should follow the CDC guidelines and keep themselves away from their pets as well as other people.

## Guidance for COVID-19 and your pets

The CDC provides some information for all pet owners in [What You Need to Know About COVID-19 and Pets](#).

The CDC, USDA and state public health and animal health officials are working in some states to conduct active surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in pets, including cats, dogs and other small mammals, that had contact with a person with COVID-19.

According to the CDC, these animals are being tested for SARS-CoV-2 infection and also tested to see whether the pet develops antibodies to this virus to help better understand how common SARS-CoV-2 infection might be in pets as well as the possible role of pets in the spread of this virus.

"The CDC also has guidelines for anyone who has a service dog," Culp said. "They don't have to separate themselves, but certainly should wear a mask."

Culp said CDC guidance indicates routine testing of [animals](#) for SARS-CoV-2 is not recommended.

"If you have an animal that a veterinarian believes to have clinical signs, they will approach it from a 'one health' approach," Culp said. "CDC wants the vet to rule out all other causes of the clinical signs first. Then if that is done and still believed the animal may be infected, the vet will contact the state animal health official and state public health veterinarians."

The state veterinarians will work with the USDA on sample collection and submission.

"We want to let people know it is not common, but it is possible," Culp said. "If you have COVID, take the precautions and social distance from your pet."

The CDC offers a number of locations where more information can be found, including: [Pets and Other Animals](#), [If You Have Pets](#) and [Guidance for Handlers of Service and Therapy Animals](#) and [Frequently asked questions](#).-

Provided by Texas A&M University

Citation: COVID-19 can affect pets (2020, July 28) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-07-covid-affect-pets.html>

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