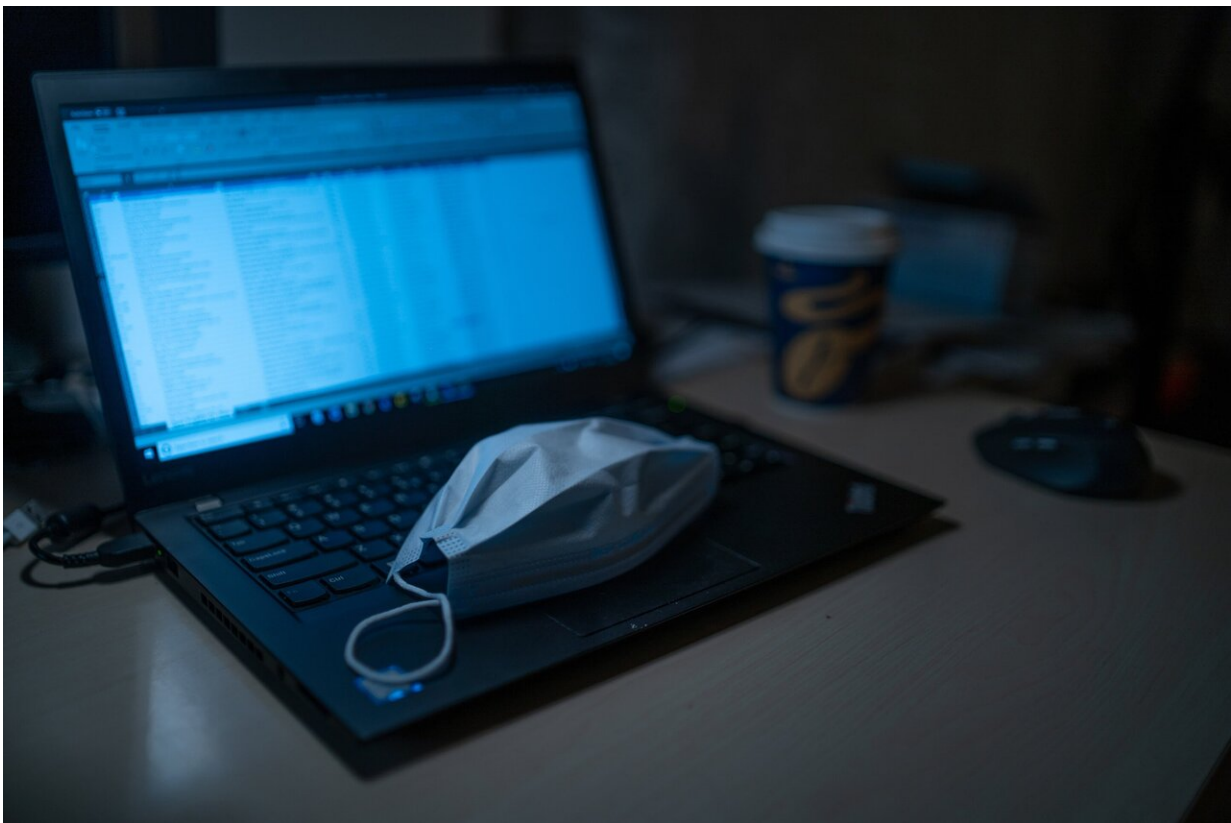


Miami Heat opens doors to fans thanks to COVID-sniffing dogs

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Miami Heat fans were able to watch a basketball game in person for the first time since the pandemic shut down the NBA last March—in part thanks to dogs trained to detect COVID infections.

With the canine help, real life spectators streamed once more into American Airlines Arena in Miami before the [game](#) against the LA Clippers Thursday—though only 2,000 were allowed, or just 10 percent of the venue's capacity.

A "canine team" guided two trained pups along the line of socially distanced fans waiting to enter the arena, and the dogs sniffed each person's hands.

"Dogs (screen) for drugs, so why not for coronavirus?" 25-year-old fan Kayla Roeber said to AFP, having just been smelled. "I think that it would prevent a lot of viruses from spreading, a lot of people entering buildings who have it."

If the dogs detect the virus, they indicate it to their handler by sitting down next to the individual in question.

In that case, according to the team's website, the potentially contaminated person and their companions must leave the line and are not permitted to enter the game. Their tickets are refunded.

"They can spot it (COVID-19) within seconds. Dogs are the most efficient mobile detection system," explained Michael Larkin, the vice president of the Global K9 Protection Group, which manages the dogs.

"They are a living, breathing animal that has this incredible olfactory senses that are used across the world in a variety of environments," he said.

He explained how they are trained to find the virus.

The "dog is not going 'Okay, tonight I'm finding COVID-19,'" he said. "They're playing a game... they've been imprinted to find this odor, and

when they find it, they get rewarded."

The [dogs](#) are just an extra level of protection against the spread of coronavirus at Heat games. Fans must still maintain social distancing and masks are required.

The Miami Heat are the first NBA team to try this screening method, which has already been tested in airports in Santiago, Dubai and Helsinki.

Its reliability, however, has not yet been totally proven.

"I think it's so new and novel that we have yet to determine how effective it is and how reliable the canines are at detecting these type of things," Douglas Kratt, president of the American Veterinary Medical Association, told CNN.

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