

Q&A REGARDING COVID-19 FOR ANIMAL OWNERS

SECTION A: GENERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING AND ANIMALS

Q1. Can COVID-19 virus affect animals?

There is currently no evidence that animals can become ill and spread the virus further.

Whilst authorities in Hong Kong have reported that they have identified two dogs which tested positive for COVID-19 virus there is no evidence that the dogs played any role in the spread of the disease to humans or other dogs. The dogs had been in direct contact with humans who were infected with COVID-19 in the same household.

Q2. Can animals spread the COVID-19 virus to humans?

There is currently no evidence that animals can spread COVID-19 either to humans or to other animals.

The exact origin of the outbreak of COVID-19 virus in the city of Wuhan in China in December 2019 is unknown. Although scientific analysis of the viral molecule indicates that initial transmission to humans may have come from a wild animal source such as bats, there is absolutely no evidence subsequent to that initial transmission of any spread of the virus from animals to humans.

Q3. Can the virus that causes COVID-19 be transmitted to humans through food?

There is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be spread through the consumption of food according to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

There are no cases of COVID-19 to date that have shown that they were infected through the consumption of contaminated food. In previous human coronavirus epidemics, food was not found to be a source of infection. However, surface contamination of food with the virus through sneezing or coughing for example is possible. It is important to observe good hygienic precautions when preparing food.

Q4. Do I need to take precautions when handling animals where there are no known cases of COVID-19 in my household?

Basic hygiene precautions should always be taken when handling animals, including regular handwashing, because animals can pass other diseases to humans, known as zoonotic diseases.

Q5. What if my animal requires veterinary attention and there is no case of COVID-19 in my household?

Animals which are ill and require veterinary care should be provided with that care. Telephone your veterinary practice in advance.

Veterinary practices are essential services to safeguard animal health and welfare and they and their staff need to be protected from possible exposure to the COVID virus. It is extremely important to protect yourself and veterinary staff from COVID-19. You should not turn up at the veterinary practice unannounced – this is in line with government advice to protect human health. Observe both the biosecurity protocol that the practice has put in place and HSE guidelines which include social distancing and handwashing.

SECTION B: QUESTIONS OF RELEVANCE TO A HOUSEHOLD WITH A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19

Q6. Do I need to avoid contact with companion animals or livestock if I am infected with COVID-19?

Yes. The HSE currently advise that people infected with COVID-19 virus or self-isolating should remain indoors. Arrangements should be made for someone else to care for your animals.

People who test positive for COVID-19 should avoid close contact with animals and organise for someone else to care for all animals including livestock and pets. Although there are no reports of animals becoming sick with COVID-19 virus it is sensible to take precautions until further information is available.

If this is not possible in the case of household pets, take additional precautions such as minimising close contact with companion animals and do not allow companion animals to lick you. Wash hands before and after any interaction with your pet animal and wear a facemask if possible. It is imperative that animal welfare standards are maintained and that animals in affected households are properly cared for.

Q7. How can I exercise my companion animal if I am infected with the COVID-19 virus?

The HSE currently advise that people infected with COVID-19 virus or self-isolating should remain indoors, so it is not advisable for you to bring your pet outdoors for exercise during this time. If possible alternative arrangements should be made to exercise your pet in line with HSE guidelines to protect human health.

Q8. Can I exercise my companion animal if I am restricting my movements because I have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case?

The HSE currently advise that people restricting their movements because they have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case can still go outside for walks or runs on their own with a dog. But they should not spend time in close contact with other people.

Q9. What if my animal requires veterinary attention and I am infected with the COVID-19 virus or I am restricting my movements because I have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case?

Veterinary practices are essential services to safeguard animal health and welfare and they and their staff need to be protected from possible exposure to COVID-19 virus. As such it is important that people who are infected with COVID-19 and who are self-isolating and those people who are restricting their movements due to close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case follow HSE advice and do not themselves bring their animals to a veterinary practice.

Alternative arrangements should be made in order to obtain veterinary care for your animal in consultation with your veterinary practitioner – this could include arranging for someone who is not restricted or infected with COVID-19 or in a vulnerable category to bring the animal to the practice for you. No person should turn up at a veterinary practice unannounced – this is in line with government advice to protect human health. **Telephone the veterinary practice to make the appropriate arrangements in advance.** The biosecurity protocol that the veterinary practice has put in place and HSE guidelines which include social distancing and handwashing should be observed by the person bringing the animal to the practice.

SECTION C: FURTHER INFORMATION

Information provided above is current and may be subject to change as further information becomes available. The following websites provide additional information on COVID-19 and are frequently updated:

[Health Service Executive – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Health Protection Surveillance Centre - Novel Coronavirus](#)

[Questions and Answers on the COVID-19: OIE - World Organisation for Animal Health \(OIE\)](#)

[European Centre for Disease Control \(ECDC\) - COVID-19](#)