

COVID-19 and Pets

WesternU cares deeply about the health and well-being of our local communities, including companion animals and their owners. A recently emerging disease affecting both is Coronavirus-19.

Like many things concerning COVID-19, there is uncertainty about its effect on our pets and their role in the dynamics of the outbreak. Excellent up-to-date information is available on the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) website (<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19>), and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#animals>, and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/interim-guidance-managing-people-in-home-care-and-isolation-who-have-pets.html>). It is important that pet owners be aware of what we know about the virus concerning pets, and that they follow the AVMA and CDC recommendations. It is equally important that pet owners do not panic and realize that we do not know all the answers. All recommendations are precautionary.

As of March 4, there is one documented case in Hong Kong of a pet dog owned by a COVID-19 patient testing positive for the virus. According to news reports, the authorities described it as a weak positive over multiple tests, and they consider the dog to be infected with COVID-19 from human-to-dog transmission. The dog is showing no symptoms or signs. It is unknown how common transmission from humans to pets may be. There is no documentation of illness/signs in pets, and no documentation of transmission from pets to pets or from pets to humans.

The recommendations from the AVMA and CDC include basic hygiene practices and taking into consideration pets in a household with an infected person, just as one would humans in a similar situation. Practice standard hygiene when interacting with pets. Wash your hands after contact with animals. If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, minimize your interaction with your pets. If possible, enlist family members or friends to care for them. Contact your veterinarian if your pet is showing signs of sneezing, runny nose, coughing, or difficulty breathing. Finally, include your pets in your emergency supply preparation of food, water, and medications.

Dr. Philip Nelson, Dean of the WesternU College of Veterinary Medicine, reminds us: "From time to time, each generation of civilization is challenged by new and novel health threats. ... These events, coupled with the unstoppable spread of the human population into areas previously unsettled, and the ease of global travel, has once again placed us in the perilous (but not unprecedented) position of facing a novel pathogen.

"Remain rational, act prudently, stay safe."