



Domestic Companion Animals and COVID-19 October 2021

Who this guidance is for: Veterinarians and health officers who may be advising people with COVID-19 in home care and isolation who have pets or other animals, or who have pets or service animals that have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2.

We are still learning about how SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 in people, can affect animals. A small number of animals worldwide have been infected with SARS-CoV-2, mostly after close contact with a person with COVID-19. In New Jersey, four cats and one dog have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. Two of the cats tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, while the other three animals tested positive on Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests. Some pets infected with SARS-CoV-2 did not show any clinical signs of illness; of those pets that did get sick, most had mild disease and fully recovered.

The virus that causes COVID-19 can spread from people to animals in some situations, especially during close contact with a person with COVID-19. The risk of pets spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low. There is no reason to abandon or surrender pets that have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2.

Guidance for people with COVID-19 infection who have pets

People with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 and who are isolating at home should be advised to restrict interaction with household animals, in addition to following other prevention measures to protect others from COVID-19. Specifically, while a person with COVID-19 is symptomatic, they should maintain separation from household animals [as they would with other household members](#), and avoid direct contact with pets. If possible, another household member should be designated to care for pets in the home and should follow standard handwashing practices before and after interacting with the household animal. If a person with COVID-19 must care for pets or other animals, they should wear a mask and wash their hands before and after caring for them. A mask should never be placed on an animal. If a pet belonging to someone with COVID-19 becomes sick, they should contact their veterinarian by phone. If the veterinarian advises that the pet should be brought to the clinic, a friend or family member who does not have COVID-19 should transport the pet.

In some instances, household animals may require alternative care or re-homing if the owner is unable to care for the animal or has surrendered the animal. A home receiving a new household animal should follow standard handwashing practices before and after interacting with the animal.

SARS-CoV-2 testing in domestic companion animals:

Routine testing of companion animals for SARS-CoV-2 is not recommended. Testing may be considered for mammalian animals in certain situations. Veterinarians are strongly encouraged to rule out other, more common causes of illness before considering SARS-CoV-2 testing. Veterinarians are advised to consult with NJDOH when considering testing pets for SARS-CoV-2. Testing should be considered for animals with compatible clinical signs of SARS-CoV-2 infection and history of exposure (i.e. living with or prolonged close contact) to a person or animal suspected or confirmed to be infected with SARS-CoV-2. Testing for SARS-CoV-2 is available for animals through the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL), and also through a limited number of commercial laboratories (including Antech, IDEXX, Zoetis, and Zoologix). Veterinarians should report all SARS-CoV-2 positive laboratory results to NJDOH; additional confirmatory testing may be required.

Testing may be recommended when a veterinarian reports:

- Animal has clinical signs suspicious of SARS-CoV-2 infection **AND** one of the following two criteria:
 - The domestic companion animal has been exposed (i.e. living with or prolonged close contact) to a person or animal suspected or confirmed to be infected with SARS-CoV-2, **OR**
 - The animal had exposure to a known high-risk environment (i.e., where human cases or animal cases have occurred), such as a residence, facility, or vessel (e.g. nursing home, prison, cruise ship)

Veterinarians should use their best judgment to determine if an animal has been exposed to people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and if the animal has clinical signs compatible with SARS-CoV-2 infection. To discuss SARS-CoV-2 testing, veterinarians should contact NJDOH during daytime hours at (609) 826-4872 or (609) 826-5964 or email zoonoticrn@doh.nj.gov.

The clinical spectrum of illness for the SARS-CoV-2 virus remains largely undefined in animals. Clinical signs more likely to be compatible with SARS-CoV-2 infection in mammalian animals may include a combination of the following:

- Fever
- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Lethargy
- Sneezing
- Nasal discharge
- Ocular discharge
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Guidance for people whose pets have SARS-CoV-2

If a pet tests positive for SARS-CoV-2:

RESTRICT ACTIVITIES: If a pet tests positive for SARS-CoV-2, owners should be advised to separate the pet from people and other animals. Owners should update the veterinarian regularly, and be told to monitor for worsening symptoms. If a pet with SARS-CoV-2 needs to be treated in the veterinary hospital, [infection prevention and control best practices](#) should be followed (CDC guidance can be found [here](#)). Pets under home isolation should be kept at home, except to get medical care. Pet owners should be advised to avoid the following activities until the veterinarian determines that it is safe for the pet to do so or the pet has met the guidance to end their isolation:

- Visiting veterinary hospitals, without calling the veterinarian first
- Visiting human healthcare facilities or schools
- Visiting parks (including dog parks), markets, or other gatherings such as festivals
- Visiting the groomer, including mobile grooming salons
- Visiting pet daycares or boarding facilities
- Serving as a therapy animal
- Going on outings such as playdates or hikes, or visiting other homes, with or without pets
- Using dog walkers or pet-sitters that live outside the home

SEPARATE FROM OTHERS: While at home, pets who have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 should stay in a designated “sick room” (such as a laundry room or extra bathroom) if possible, or otherwise be separated from people and other animals. This is the same way a person with COVID-19 would separate from others in their household. If possible, they should be provided with a litterbox or bathroom area separate from other pets. Infected pets should be provided with bedding, bowls or containers, treats, and toys that are separate from those used by other people or animals in the household. People should avoid contact with the pet as much as possible, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food or bedding. Although there is no evidence that companion animals can transmit SARS-CoV-2 to humans, these precautions are recommended out of an abundance of caution until more is known about virus transmission.

- **DOGS** should only be walked if there is no private backyard available for elimination. If a dog must be walked, this should be limited to bathroom breaks only, close to their home, and kept at least 6 feet away from other pets and people. Other people should not touch or interact with the dog.
- **CATS** that have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 should be kept inside at all times, and not allowed to roam outside.

CLEAN UP: There is no evidence to suggest that waste from infected pets needs any additional disinfection. Gloves should be worn when cleaning up after the pet, and fecal material or litterbox waste should be placed in a sealed bag before being disposed of. People should be reminded to always wash their hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning up after a pet.

- Disinfect bowls, toys, and other animal care items with an EPA-registered disinfectant and rinse thoroughly with clean water afterwards.
- Soft items like towels, blankets, and other bedding, can be safely laundered and reused. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill animal can be washed with other items.

PERSONAL PROTECTION: Pet owners and people caring for pets should follow similar recommended precautions as for people caring for an infected person at home. Individuals who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 should have another household member care for the pet, if possible.

- People should wear a mask and gloves in the same room or area as the sick pet. Animals should not wear a face mask.
- Use gloves when handling the pet's dishes, toys, or bedding and when picking up feces (poop). Throw out gloves and place waste material or litterbox waste in a sealed bag before throwing away in a trashcan lined with a trash bag. People should always wash their hands with soap and water immediately after cleaning up after their pet.
- Wash hands regularly throughout the day.
- Do not wipe or bathe pets with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or other products not intended or approved for use on animals. There is no evidence that SARS-CoV-2 can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of pets. Using chemical disinfectants on a pet may be harmful.

ENDING HOME ISOLATION: Veterinarians should advise owners when it is safe for their pet to be around other people and animals. If the animal is not being monitored by a veterinarian, owners should keep them isolated until:

- At least 72 hours since their clinical signs of illness have resolved without the use of medications intended to relieve symptoms; **AND** one of the following conditions are met:
 - At least 14 days have passed since their last positive test from a lab that uses a validated SARS-CoV-2 RT-PCR diagnostic assay, **OR**
 - All sample types collected at follow-up are negative by a validated SARS-CoV-2 RT PCR diagnostic assay.

For more information:

- [CDC COVID-19 and Animals](#)

- [CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Veterinary Clinics During the COVID-19 Response](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus Households with Pets](#)
- [CDC What to do if your pet tests positive](#)
- [AVMA Interim recommendations for intake of companion animals from households where humans with COVID-19 are present](#)
- [OIE guidance](#)
- [National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians Compendium of Veterinary Standard Precautions for Zoonotic Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel](#)