SARS-CoV-2 Testing for Companion Animals

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel (new) coronavirus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Human patients with COVID-19 have experienced mild to severe respiratory illness, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath; patients also report sore throat, myalgia, and headache.

Recently, a small number of companion animals have tested positive for COVID-19. We are still learning about this virus, but it appears that it can spread from people to animals in some situations. There have been no reports of severe disease or deaths associated with SARS-CoV-2 infection in animals. While much is currently unknown about this organism, at this time there is no evidence to suggest any animals, including pets or livestock, can spread COVID-19 infection to people.

At this time, little is known about COVID-19 infections in companion animals. Based on what is known about other coronaviruses, animals are likely to present with a combination of respiratory or gastrointestinal signs. Since there is no specific treatment for SARS-CoV-2 in animals, testing an animal would generally not change its management. Veterinarians would continue to provide appropriate supportive care. Routine testing for SARS-CoV-2, such as testing performed on healthy animals, is not recommended at this time.

Requests for Testing Companion Animals for SARS-CoV-2

Veterinarians wishing to request SARS-CoV-2 testing should complete the COVID-19 Domestic Companion Animal Testing Request Worksheet. Please have complete animal information and clinical and exposure history available.

Given limited resources, decisions about animal testing for SARS-CoV-2 will be made collaboratively by the State Veterinarian and the State Public Health Veterinarian. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis following guidance provided by USDA, CDC, FDA, National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials [NASAHO], and AVMA (https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/testing-animals-sars-cov-2):

- Animal has clinical signs consistent with SARS-CoV-2, more common causes of the animal’s clinical signs have been ruled out, and the animal has a history of
  - Close contact with a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, or
  - Exposure to a known high-risk environment where a human outbreak occurred, such as a residence, facility (e.g., nursing home, prison), or cruise ship
- Atypical patterns of disease suggesting a novel pathogen in a mass care situation (e.g., animal shelter, boarding facility, animal feeding operation, zoo) where exposure history is not known (appropriate diagnostics should be undertaken first to rule out more common causes of disease)
- Threatened or endangered nonhuman primates or other species in zoos or other facilities will be considered for testing on a case-by-case basis.
- A thorough species-appropriate diagnostic workup should be completed before testing is requested. Testing will only be approved if there is no evidence for an alternate diagnosis. In rare cases, testing might be approved while the diagnostic workup is pending.
For additional information and guidance about testing animals for SARS-CoV-2:

For questions, contact the State Veterinarian at the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (email: mary.lis@ct.gov, phone: 860-713-2546) or the State Public Health Veterinarian at the Connecticut Department of Public Health (email: jocelyn.mullins@ct.gov, phone: 860-509-7906).

Frequently Asked Questions about testing companion animals for SARS-CoV-2

Why is testing limited?

- There is no specific treatment for SARS-CoV-2 in animals, so testing an animal would generally not change its management.
- There is no evidence that pets are involved in transmission to humans, and therefore a positive test has limited public health significance. Transmission from people to animals appears to be rare.
- Sampling and testing requires personal protective equipment and resources that are needed for the response to pandemic.
- Appropriate testing of a single animal requires multiple sets of samples. All presumptive positive results must be confirmed by the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL). Routine testing without a defined purpose can hamper the national and international response and may risk harm (such as abandonment) to the welfare of pets.

Who will pay for SARS-CoV-2 testing?

If animal testing is approved, the animal’s owner will incur the financial costs associated with sample collection, shipping, and testing.

Where will the testing be completed?

If animal testing is approved, samples should be sent to a National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) laboratory so positive tests can quickly be forwarded to USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) for confirmation and reporting to World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

The Animal Health Diagnostic Center (AHDC) at Cornell University is the nearest NAHLN lab offering SARS-CoV-2 animal testing. Submission guidelines and lab contact information for AHDC are available on their website, https://www.vet.cornell.edu/animal-health-diagnostic-center/about/SARS-CoV-2.

If the veterinarian does not have an account with AHDC, or additional services such as necropsy are being requested, samples may be sent to the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (CVMDL) also a NAHLN laboratory and the samples will be referred to the AHDC for testing.

Please note: Positive tests run at a private laboratory must be confirmed at NVSL to be recognized as official tests. If a private laboratory does find a positive sample on a test that was run without the prior approval of state and federal officials, the owner will likely incur additional sample collection, shipping, and testing costs to verify the result. If samples will be sent to a private lab, a second set of duplicate samples using the NVSL protocol must be collected in case confirmation is needed at NVSL. Collecting a subsequent sample puts the sample collector in a position of unnecessary risk and duplicate samples are wasteful while supplies are short and delays confirmation of test results.

Who will collect the animal samples?

If animal testing is approved, a state-appointed veterinarian, USDA-accredited veterinarian, or Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostician (FADD) will collect the sample using appropriate personal protective equipment and sample collection methods.
What sample types will be collected and how should they be stored?

Oral, nasal, and rectal/fecal swabs should be collected per OIE recommendations and according to established sample collection protocols [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/faq-sapho-on-companion-animal-testing.pdf](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/faq-sapho-on-companion-animal-testing.pdf). Please submit oral, nasal, and rectal swabs in separate vials. If a veterinarian does not have the necessary collection swabs or media, they can be requested from the AHDC or CVMDL.

What is the reporting process?

The State Veterinarian will receive the results from NVSL & USDA and will inform the Public Health Veterinarian and the attending veterinarian, who will inform the animal’s owner.

My client has been diagnosed with a confirmed case of COVID-19. What should I tell them to do with their pet?

CDC, WHO, and OIE recommend that pets stay with their owners whenever possible. It is recommended that people ill with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus.

- When possible, another member of the household should care for the pet.
- If possible, the infected person should avoid contact with the pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food.
- If an infected person must care for the pet while they are sick, they should wear a cloth facemask and wash their hands before and after interacting with them.
- Dogs should be walked outside on a 6-foot leash for elimination and exercise while avoiding contact with other people and animals.

What do I tell my client if their pet tests positive?


- The pet should be isolated from other animals.
- People in the household should avoid direct, prolonged contact with the pet.
- Those caring for the pet should wear gloves and a facemask.
- Wear gloves when handling pet’s dishes, toys, or bedding and when picking up feces.
- Dogs: If the client has a private backyard where their dog can go to the bathroom, do not take them for walks. If they must walk the dog, limit to bathroom breaks only, stay close to home, and keep the dog at least 6 feet away from other pets and people. Do not let other people touch or interact with the dog.
- Cats: Cats should be kept strictly indoors.
- Provide bedding, bowls or containers, treats, and toys that are separate from those used by other people or animals in the household. Disinfect bowls, toys, and other items and rinse thoroughly with clean water. Soft items like towels, blankets, and other bedding, can be safely laundered with other items and reused.
- Monitor closely for new or worsening signs.

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