



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
Oxiris Barbot, MD  
*Commissioner*

## 2020 Veterinary Advisory # 2:

### COVID-19 UPDATES

- **NO evidence companion animals become ill with COVID-19, or spread the SARS-CoV-2 (the virus which causes COVID-19 disease)**
  - **No recognized risk to persons who own or care for them**
- **Encourage clients to develop emergency plans including alternate care of their pets**
- **Defining essential services for veterinarians and animal care services**
- **COVID-19 testing of pets**
- **Physical distancing and infection control in your practice**
- **Staff management including health monitoring and self-isolation at home when ill**

March 23, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

We are in a challenging time as the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly accelerates in NYC. Our fellow clinicians in the human healthcare world are working far outside the normal practice of medicine and will likely have to adhere to different standards of care during the next several weeks to months. Learning from the experience of our colleagues in other countries hardest hit by COVID-19, and watching the pandemic unfold in NYC, impacts on our healthcare system will continue to worsen. Many healthcare facilities are experiencing high patient volumes that will likely increase in the coming days and weeks.

The impacts are being felt by all of us, including those of us who care for animals as well as our companion animals. Pets play an important role in people's lives. There is extensive research on the human-animal bond and the value they bring to our mental and physical health. Removing pets from an owner could lead to immeasurable negative consequences for both the person and the pet.

At this time there is NO evidence that companion animals, including pets, get sick with COVID-19, or spread the SARS-CoV-2 (the virus which causes COVID-19 disease) - therefore, there is no recognized risk to persons who own or care for them. Prevention of COVID-19 should be focused on measures that prevent or limit person to person spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

To protect pets from respiratory diseases, clients can vaccinate for Bordetella, parainfluenza and canine influenza, which are the most common vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases in pets.

#### BACKGROUND

There has been extensive coverage of the dog which tested weakly positive for SARS-CoV-2 in [Hong Kong](#) using a real time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (rRT-PCR). The rRT-PCR assay is extremely sensitive and able to detect minimal amounts of virus or viral fragments of RNA. It cannot distinguish between viable virus (virus capable of causing infection), or pieces of virus. Additionally, it is



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important to note additional testing was done using a serologic assay which did not detect antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 and subsequent rRT-PCR testing was negative. The rRT-PCR assay is specific to SARS-CoV-2 and is not cross-reactive with other coronaviruses of dogs and cats.

### WHAT TO TELL YOUR CLIENTS

- Make arrangements with a neighbor, friend, family member or pet sitting service who can care for your pet in case you become ill.
- When walking your dog, keep at least 6 feet between you and others.
- Always practice hand hygiene, wash hands with soap and water when returning home from walks.
- Make sure you have ample pet food and other supplies needed (e.g., cat litter).
- There is no evidence that companion animals or pets get sick with COVID-19. Therefore, there is no recognized risk to persons who own or care for them.

### ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Specific guidance for what is deemed an essential veterinary or animal care service has not been clearly described. The NYS Department of Agriculture provided interim guidance which can be found online <https://agriculture.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/03/interimguidanceforanimalcareoperations.pdf>

In brief here are the descriptions that apply to most of you:

#### **Companion Animals**

- Care and feeding of companion animals in shelters, kennels, rescues, operations and pet stores
- Pet food manufacturers, distributors, and retailers
- Essential veterinary care, including spay/neuter, treatment for infectious disease
- Animal shelters receiving seized, lost or abandoned animals
- Adoption of animals from within New York State
- Pet boarding facilities
- Service dog training and care

If a business does not fall within this guidance, but you believe that it is essential or it is an entity providing essential services or functions, you may request designation as an essential business. **To request designation as an essential business, please [click here](#).**

### TESTING

- There is no epidemiological evidence that animals play a role in the transmission of this virus, nor is there evidence that they can become infected themselves. Public health is not recommending you test pets for COVID-19 at this time; instead rule out other common causes of patient symptoms. Laboratory tests for COVID-19 in animals are being developed and advertised now, however they should be used with caution as there is a very real possibility that given the positive predictive value there will be a false positive result.
- The New York City Health Department strongly discourages testing pets for COVID-19. Should a veterinarian have a patient for whom they feel testing may be indicated, please contact the NYC Health Department in advance to discuss the case. Also feel free to contact us if you have questions or need to discuss a sick patient that had close contact with a person with COVID-19.



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
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- If you receive a positive test result, it [should immediately be reported](#) to the NYC Health Department.

### **MANAGING APPOINTMENTS AND DAILY ACTIVITIES TO PRACTICE PHYSICAL DISTANCING**

- For all upcoming appointments, determine how you would classify pets as needing to be urgently seen, versus ones that need routine care or surgery that could possibly be delayed.
- At this time there is a critical shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) for human healthcare workers and facilities. You can help by preserving your stock and avoid new orders. No special PPE is necessary for handling pets of sick clients.
- Consider having clients call you from their car upon arrival and have someone from your practice pick up the animal outside so the client does not have to come inside the practice. Discuss care measures via cell phone.
- Persons diagnosed with COVID-19 or with COVID-19 like illness are required to self-isolate themselves at home for a prescribed period of time (see below). If a client who is under self-isolation has pet with an urgent need for veterinary attention, have a plan in place for the pet to receive an evaluation. Options might include having a family member or bring the pet it.
- Restrict employee visitors (family, friends, and pets).
- Limiting the number of people coming into the clinic
- Follow strict infection control within the practice to keep staff and clients safe
  - Do not allow staff, clients or visitors with COVID-19 like illness enter the premises.
  - Have staff wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the restroom; before eating; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; and between client/patient visits. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60%-95% alcohol.
  - Place hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, and tissues in all exam rooms, meeting rooms, restrooms, break rooms, lobbies, and other common areas.
  - Cough or sneeze into your elbow or use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth, then throw the tissue into the trash can and wash your hands.
  - Remind staff and clients to avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth and to maintain physical distancing.
  - Take steps to prevent the spread of all infectious diseases among veterinary personnel and to/from clients by following guidelines and procedures, which includes environmental cleaning, laid out in the [National Association of State Public Health Veterinarian's Compendium of Veterinary Standard Precautions for Zoonotic Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel](#).
  - Standard cleaning and disinfection protocols will kill the virus that causes COVID-19. Be sure to follow the correct contact time and dilution instructions for the products you use. Focus additional disinfection on high contact and high touch surfaces such as phones, doorknobs, keyboards, and equipment.
  - How long a virus can survive on a surface depends on several factors, including:
    - The characteristics of the virus itself
    - The type of surface
    - Environmental conditions, including temperature, humidity, and exposure to sunlight
    - Cleaning products used



Some early scientific evidence suggests that viable SARS-CoV-2 can survive for 2 to 3 hours on surfaces like stainless steel, though this was determined under experimental conditions and does not necessarily occur outside of a laboratory-controlled setting. However, it does highlight there is a role for appropriate cleaning in the human healthcare settings. Person to person spread is the most important driver of COVID-19 transmission.

#### **WHAT TO TELL CLIENTS WHO ARE SICK WITH COVID-19**

- Recommend persons with confirmed or possible COVID-19 who live in a residence with a pet, similar to any time they have an infectious respiratory or enteric disease, they should avoid face to face contact, snuggling, being kissed or licked by the pet and sharing food. If the ill individual must care for the pet, they should wash their hands before and after interacting with the pet.
- Clients who are sick and self-isolating at home have options for walking or boarding their pet:
  - If no one else is available and they must walk the dog themselves, they should maintain physical distancing while they bring the dog to quickly urinate and defecate.
  - If they hire a dog walker, ensure they hand off the dog and maintain physical distancing between themselves and the dog walker.
  - Have pre-arranged plans for pets in case there is a need for boarding or have someone else care for the pet (e.g., hospitalized or temporarily unable to manage their care). Maintain physical distancing while handing off to person who is picking up the pet.

#### **HAVE STAFF MONITOR THEIR HEALTH EVERY DAY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

- To prevent further spread of COVID-19, all New Yorkers should monitor their health every day during the COVID-19 pandemic. Monitoring one's health is an important tool to promptly recognize early onset of illness to recognize when to stay at home, self-isolate and avoid exposing others to COVID-19.
- Staff should check themselves every day to see if they have any new symptoms that are not due to an underlying health condition (such as asthma or emphysema) and are consistent with **COVID-19 like-illness including**.
  - New temperature (100.4°F or 38.0°C or greater) or begin to feel warm
  - New cough
  - New shortness of breath
  - New sore throat

**Note:** Children with fever and sore throat may have an illness other than COVID-19 (like strep throat). Consult a healthcare provider to see if it is necessary to rule out other causes.

#### **WHAT STAFF SHOULD DO IF THEY BECOME SICK**

- If any of your staff have **confirmed or possible COVID-19**, they must **self-isolate at home**. Isolation helps separate sick people from people who are not sick.
  - **Stay home** for at least 7 days after your symptoms started or at least 3 days after your symptoms have improved and fever has ended without fever-reducing medicines (such as Advil or Tylenol), whichever is longer. If you have a mild to moderate illness, don't leave the house to get tested. Testing is only needed if you are admitted to the hospital.



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For example:

- If fever begins on March 1 and lasts until March 3, remain isolated until March 8 (which is 7 days from beginning of symptoms)
- If cough begins on March 1 and does not begin to significantly improve until March 8, which is also your last day of fever, remain isolated until March 11 (which is 3 days from fever ending and symptom improvement).
- Persons with COVID-19 like illness who do not require hospitalization should NOT get tested and should only seek health care if they are very sick. The emergency room should be reserved for people with severe illness.
- The NYC Health Department is not requiring 14-day quarantine for close contacts of cases. Instead, all persons should be monitoring their health daily, and self-isolating as described above if they become ill. However, businesses and organizations can develop their own policies.

**RESOURCES**

- NYC HEALTH DEPARTMENT <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-main.page>
- CDC Healthy Animals, Healthy People ([www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.html)) webpage
- American Veterinary Medical Association: COVID-19 ([www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19](http://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19)), with additional suggestions for modifying clinic traffic