

COVID- 19, Your Pet and Your Vet

Constantly shifting global and local developments have made it challenging at times to keep up to date with the latest coronavirus information. This fact sheet was designed to inform you on our current understanding of the COVID- 19 disease and how it impacts you and your pet.

Where did the virus come from?

The virus is believed to have originated in a live seafood and animal market in the city of Wuhan, the largest city of the Chinese province of Hubei. In December 2019 a small group of people associated with this market demonstrated signs of pneumonia which later spread to family members and healthcare professionals treating the infected¹. This novel virus has since spread to affect approximately 203 countries² and on March 11 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) designated the COVID-19 outbreak from an epidemic to a pandemic³.

What is the difference between an epidemic and a pandemic?

The basic definition of an epidemic is the “increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected in that population in that area”. A pandemic refers to “an epidemic that has spread over several countries or continents, usually affecting a large number of people.”⁴

What is a coronavirus?

The coronavirus responsible for the current pandemic is just one of many viruses in the coronavirus family. Coronaviruses (CoV) have protein spikes giving the appearance of a crown. “Corona” in Latin means crown.

This family of virus can cause disease in both animals and humans, affecting breathing as well as the gastrointestinal system. In humans, several coronaviruses are associated with respiratory disease and can range in severity from the common cold to illness such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV), identified in China in 2003 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012¹.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS – CoV-2) is the official scientific name for the novel coronavirus and the disease it causes is COVID-19⁵.

Can coronaviruses in general be transferred from animal to humans?

Many strains of coronavirus cannot spread from animals to humans and vice versa. There are some coronaviruses that have demonstrated the ability to cross species as seen in the 2003 SARS – CoV outbreak which originated from a cat and MERS – CoV which was transmitted from camels⁵. In order for the transmission of a pathogen from an animal to a human to occur, several factors need to align⁶.

It is uncertain which species the current SARS – CoV -2 spilled over from but it’s genetic code is very similar to that of a coronavirus found in horseshoe bats⁷. To date however there is not enough scientific evidence to identify the source or explain the route of transmission from an animal source to humans⁵.

If coronaviruses have the ability to cross species can my dog be affected by COVID -19?

To date there are two known cases of dogs testing positive to the COVID-19 virus. Both cases occurred in Hong Kong, and the affected dogs had close exposure to their owners who were positive for COVID-19. This is believed to be an example of human to dog transmission.⁵

At no point did the dogs show any symptoms of the disease⁸.

It should be noted that no infectious virus was isolated from the dogs⁹. There is no evidence to suggest that animals infected by humans are playing a role in the spread of COVID-19. Human outbreaks are by person to person contact⁵.

What about cats, can they be affected by COVID-19?

On 27th March 2020 a pet cat in Belgium, whose owner was infected with the COVID-19 virus also tested positive for the virus. The cat was reported to have vomiting, diarrhoea and respiratory signs. Further information to follow.

Human to animal transmission is still exceedingly rare. 4000 dogs and cats were tested from Canada, USA and EU including areas with high numbers of human COVID-19 cases and all samples have been negative to date⁹.

Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I am sick with COVID-19?

As the outbreak continues, a number of pet owners will be placed in quarantine, either with confirmed COVID-19 infection or due to exposure. We know that your pet is part of your family and you will want them to have the same level of protection and care as any other family member. Current information suggests there is no apparent risk to you or your pet from being in quarantine with you. However, we do advise all pet owners continue to practice appropriate hand hygiene before and after handling their pet, their food and washing food/water bowls. At no stage should pet owners do anything that may compromise the welfare of their pets. We suggest minimising close contact with your pet during this time, such as hugging, face to face contact or sleeping on your bed¹⁰.

What do I do if I am in quarantine or self-isolation and my pet is unwell?

If you are in quarantine, do not break quarantine to take your pet to the veterinarian even if your pet is unwell. By doing this you will put your veterinarian and staff at risk of infection. Ring your veterinary surgery first and ask for advice. Dr Suze is currently still conducting house visits wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if needed and offering telephone/video consultations depending on your personal circumstances.

Please call us for a chat: 1300 88 25 24 or email: susanna@drsuzemyvisitingvet.com.au

If your pet needs to be seen, we will be able to work with you to ensure your pet will receive the care they need, whilst keeping safe from COVID-19 infection.

Can I get COVID- 19 from my pet?

At this stage there is no evidence that pet dogs or cats are a source of infection to other animals or humans. There are many agencies around the globe continuing to monitor this situation and will provide updated information as it becomes available.

Clarification around the coronavirus outbreak in Greyhounds.

On 28th February 2020 the Greyhound Racing Victoria issued a press release about cases of canine coronavirus infections in greyhounds. Canine coronavirus is totally unrelated to the COVID-19 situation and poses no discernible risk to human health.

What can I do to protect myself from COVID -19?

You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking some simple precautions¹¹:

- Stay at home. Don't visit friends, and don't visit family at this time.
- Do not travel overseas, interstate, take a cruise or travel domestically in Victoria unless absolutely necessary.
- Stay healthy with good nutrition, regular exercise, sensible drinking, sleeping well, and for smokers, quitting.
- Do not participate in community gatherings including community sport.
- Take the following hygiene actions:
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing, or using the toilet. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitiser that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow.
 - Do not share drink bottles, crockery or cutlery.
- Stop shaking hands, hugging or kissing as a greeting.
- Ensure a distance of at least 1.5 metres is kept between yourself and others.
- Get vaccinated for flu (influenza) when available. This will help reduce the strain on the healthcare system as it deals with coronavirus.
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces regularly e.g. phones, keyboards, door handles, light switches, bench tops.

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