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Pan American Center for Foot-and-Mouth
Disease and Veterinary Public Health



COVID-19

JOINT ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS AND DOGS AND CATS

Experts warn that companion animals pose no threat during the novel coronavirus pandemic

BACKGROUND

The Pan American Center for Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Veterinary Public Health of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PANAFTOSA-PAHO/WHO) and World Animal Protection gathered to update the public with information regarding COVID-19 and pets (dogs and cats).

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is causing great uncertainty worldwide in several aspects, among them, the threat to companion animals' welfare since many people are concerned their pets could get sick and spread the virus. This misinformation has led to fear and resulted in dogs and cats being abandoned or mercilessly killed.

This could bring about other public health situations, such as increased animal bites and attacks, running over animals resulting in car accidents and, possibly, a rise of diseases among animals and eventual zoonoses such as rabies and leishmaniasis, among others.

A survey has been conducted to clear doubts and distinguish myths from reality. Our message is simple:

To date, there is no scientific evidence that companion animals (dogs and cats) are a source of infection for humans. There is no evidence that dogs can get sick and the infection is being investigated in cats. The recommendations regarding animals continue to be handwashing before and after interacting with them and their belongings as well as keeping some distance if you are sick.

We recommend pet owners to continue taking care of them and keep calm. **Abandoning dogs and cats is unacceptable and under no circumstance it is a solution for the COVID-19 pandemic. Neither is animal euthanasia. This pandemic is not, and should not be used as, an excuse to practice merciless killing.**

There is plenty of scientific evidence that dogs and cats improve and enhance the life and health of their owners, they protect their homes and production animals and are able to learn and even perform extraordinary tasks. Furthermore, they can be an important emotional support for the families by reducing the levels of stress and suicidal tendencies, which is a substantial support in times of social distancing. Take care of your pets as well as of yourself!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON COVID-19 AND PETS (DOGS AND CATS)

1. Can dogs and cats transmit COVID-19 to humans?

The World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA), as well as other human and animal health associations indicate that there is currently no scientific evidence that companion animals can be a source of infection for us.

There is no evidence that dogs can be infected with COVID-19. There are few reports of cats that seem to have been infected with the virus, all of them after contact with people with COVID-19, or deliberately infected at labs. Cat cases are now under investigation. However, there is no current evidence that cats can transmit the virus to humans. However, information on the coronavirus is rapidly evolving so relevant updates will be provided as new information becomes available.

2. What about the Pomeranian and German Shepherd that tested positive in Hong Kong, as well as the cat that tested positive in Belgium?

Some dogs and cats were put in quarantine and laboratory tested for coronavirus. As of March 30, three curious cases of a probable infection were detected and all of them are considered isolated cases.

The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) informed that:

"The Veterinary Services of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China reported to OIE that two dogs had become infected with the COVID-19 virus following close exposure to their owners who were sick with COVID-19. The tests, conducted by real-time PCR, showed the presence of genetic material from the COVID-19 virus in nasal and oral samples. The dogs showed no clinical signs of the disease." In fact, the German Shepherd lived with a mixed-breed dog that never got sick and the virus was not detected by PCR test.

"The Veterinary Services of Belgium reported to OIE that a cat belonging to a person positive for COVID-19 tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. The cat showed signs of respiratory and gastrointestinal disease. The test, conducted by real-time PCR, showed the presence of genetic material of the COVID-19 virus in vomit and feces samples. The infection is suspected but not yet confirmed." According to experts, this case is controversial and some of them think more tests are needed to conclude that the cat was sick with COVID-19."

There is no evidence whatsoever that dogs or cats are playing a role in the transmission of the disease to humans. Further research is being carried out to establish how some animals can be affected by the COVID-19 virus."

We should always remember to take the appropriate sanitary measures: hand washing before and after having been in contact with animals or handling their belongings. <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019-novel-coronavirus>

3. Can I kiss and hug my dogs? Can I let my dogs lick and hug me and my kids?

Although we love our pets, kissing them is not a good idea. As well as humans, dogs and cats carry a lot of bacteria in their mouths that can cause diseases. Some dogs like to be hugged, others do not. Please, do not hug dogs or cats that feel uncomfortable or scared: they could be stressed and may bite. This advice is especially important for children, since they cannot read cat or dog behavior as well as adults do. If you wish to pet companion animals, do it, but you should wash your hands before and after touching, walking or feeding them to eliminate any microbes, including coronavirus, if it has come into contact with you or your pet.

4. If I am sick with COVID-19, should I avoid contact with my pets?

Although there is no evidence that dogs have become sick with COVID-19 and little evidence that cats can be susceptible, it is still recommended that people who are sick with this disease restrict contact with animals until further information about the virus is available. In this way, we watch for ourselves and for them. There is still much to be learned about COVID-19; more information will be available as time passes.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend the following:

“If you are sick with COVID-19, restrict contact with pets and other animals, just as you would do with any other person around you. Although there are no reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19 yet, it is still recommended that people sick with the disease limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. As far as possible, ask another member of your household to care for your animals while you are recovering. If you are infected with COVID-19, avoid contact with your pet, this includes hugging, petting, kissing, being licked and sharing food. If you must care for your pet or be near animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after interacting with them and wear a mask”.

We advise you to check the information regularly updated on the CDC website:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/animals.html>.

5. If I am sick with COVID-19, should I avoid contact with my pets?

There is currently no scientific evidence that companion animals can be a source of coronavirus infection for humans. Therefore, there is no need to quarantine your pet if you get sick. Nevertheless, the CDC recommends the following “... if you are infected with COVID-19, limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. As far as possible, ask another member of your household to care for your animals while you are recovering. If you are sick with COVID-19, avoid contact with your pet, this includes hugging, petting, kissing, being licked and sharing food. If you must care for your pet or be near animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after interacting with pets and wear a mask”.

We advise you to check the information regularly updated on the CDC website:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/animals.html>.

6. If my dog or cat gets sick, what should I do?

Dogs and cats can get sick for many reasons. There is no evidence at this time that dogs can get sick from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and there is no evidence to assure that cats get sick with this virus. Nevertheless, if your dog or cat develops an atypical disease or comes into contact with someone infected with COVID-19, contact your veterinary doctor or public health official. This official will certainly advise you to take your pet to the veterinarian. Inform your vet on the situation so she/he can be prepared in advance. Do not take your pet to the veterinarian unless you are told to do so.

7. Should I put on a mask on my dog or cat if it gets sick?

No. Masks can interfere with breathing and cause stress and shortness of breath on animals. Flat-faced breeds (Pugs, Bulldogs, Himalayas, etc.), which already have problems with breathing, may suffer severe heatstroke and pass out when using a mask.

8. Can I walk my dog?

The most important thing is that you follow the rules and recommendations given by your government regarding leaving the house and keeping safe. If you can still go out without contact with other people and you are not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, you may walk your dog. There is no evidence that dogs can get sick or transmit COVID-19 to humans. The virus cannot be transmitted through feces either. However, it is of utmost importance that you pick up your dog feces and discard them responsibly to respect public health and your community. Always wash your hands before and after interacting with your pet or its belongings and make sure to sanitize all surfaces in your house.

The right thing to do is to keep social isolation but it is also vital that your pets walk and exercise. If you are going out with your dog, we advise you to follow the recommendations of Veterinary Councils to keep us all safe:

- Only one person should walk the dog each time;
- Look for places with a reduced number of people and choose quiet hours;
- Avoid contact with other animals and people;
- Walks outdoors should be short and focused, only to meet physiological needs
- When you are back home, wash your pet's paws with neutral soap and water, making sure to wash the fur and in-between the toes. Do not use alcohol, chlorine or other irritating substances. Ask your vet to learn about safe products for your pet.

9. How do I replace walking my dog when 'staying at home' is the official indication?

Dogs and cats need physical activity. Therefore, you should keep the time allotted for walking them, but replace it with play. For instance, a ball game in the backyard or, if you live in an apartment, make up games with new toys

or enrich the environment by hiding “treats” so that your dog does not get bored. In the case of cats, it is important to provide them vertical structures that they can climb. It is essential to maintain the routine of exercise and games to keep pets entertained during the quarantine.

10. Is there any risk that our pets bring the virus to our home if they have been outside?

It is not impossible that your pet brings the virus to your home if COVID-19 virus is circulating in the community, if a sick person coughed or sneezed on them. The same happens with your shoes and, therefore, it is advisable to have “street footwear” and change it to “home footwear”.

You could choose to wash your pet paws with water and neutral soap or shampoo for animals (such as dog shampoo), after walking the dog, or clean its paws with a cloth moistened with soap and water. **DO NOT USE** alcohol or household disinfectants on the fur of animals as they may cause irritation.

It is not advisable to bathe dogs every day. Follow the instructions of products for animals and keep them brushed up and clean.

11. Should I vaccinate my dog against coronavirus??

SARS-CoV 2 (causing COVID-19 in people) and CCoV (causing gastrointestinal disease in dogs) viruses are completely different species.

Vaccines currently used in dogs against coronavirus protect them against gastrointestinal infections produced by other types of coronavirus (CCoV) and are not licensed to protect against SARS-CoV 2 (COVID-19). There is no scientific evidence that the vaccine used for dogs against coronavirus provides cross-protection against an infection caused by the novel virus 2019 in animals. Therefore, the canine vaccine against coronavirus does not combat COVID-19.

12. What do I do with my companion animal if I am hospitalized??

As recommended for any emergency, your pet should be vaccinated, sterilized, and wear a collar with identification. It is also a good idea to buy enough pet food and the prescribed medication for 15 days in case you cannot leave your home. Ask some family member or reliable friend to care for your pet if you are hospitalized.

Some dogs and cats may become nervous, anxious or even aggressive in a new place (they do not feel safe) so, it would be better if someone could come home to feed and play with them. However, if there is a lockdown, the best is that someone (preferably someone familiar to the animal) takes the pet to a temporary home where it will be well cared for.

13. If I am responsible for several animals, as a dog walker or caretaker, should I stay home and leave my job?

You should follow the recommendations of the Veterinary Council or City Council of your region or country. You can replace the walks with dogs and take care of them inside the house: play with them and create activities to help them exercise and, as far as possible, maintain their previous routines.

Animal “caretakers”, like all people, should follow sanitary recommendations: washing hands, social distancing, coughing/sneezing appropriately, disinfecting surfaces. Always wash your hands before and after interacting with animals.

14. What is the recommendation to interact with stray dogs?

As with pets with owners, there is no evidence that stray dogs (unowned or community dogs) can get sick from COVID-19 or spread the disease to humans. In sum, owned or not, they are still dogs. Nevertheless, if you come into contact with a community dog, make sure to wash your hands afterward to remove any kind of microbes, including COVID-19, in case it is on the dog’s fur.

Some stray dogs may unnecessarily suffer during this pandemic. People who feed them may need to stay home or observe the lockdown. In addition, despite the evidence that dogs and cats do not transmit the disease, they could have been abandoned or even euthanized due to fear. Killing roaming dogs is not only cruel, but it is also a crime and useless to eliminate zoonotic diseases transmitted by dogs.

Link to the page with the 5 tips to prevent dog bites:

https://www.worldanimalprotection.org/sites/default/files/media/int_files/3._five_tips_-_poster.pdf

15. I have read that some people are abandoning or “putting to sleep” their dogs as well as other animals as a preventive measure. Should I do the same to be safe?

It is unfortunate that due to misplaced fear people abandon or even euthanize their animals. As we mentioned before, there is no evidence that dogs or cats can spread COVID-19 or transmit it to humans. Since COVID-19 is a human-to-human transmission disease, the best way to prevent it is staying at home, maintaining social distancing, constant handwashing, responsible coughing/sneezing, and wiping surfaces with disinfectant.

Abandoning or killing animals make them suffer and feeds the panic cycle; it is a crime, is cruel and unethical and does not resolve the pandemic.

Pets have shown to be excellent company and can even reduce stress levels and suicidal tendencies, something that is highly positive during our current quarantine situation due to the pandemic. We recommend all pet owners to continue taking care of their animals and keep calm. Abandonment should not be an option under any circumstance.

Be responsible owners, keep on loving and taking care of your pets but avoid kissing them, and wash your hands before and after touching them or their belongings.

16. Should my community drive off stray animals in the area or call local authorities to take care of them, just to be safer?

No. Animals should not become victims of this pandemic. They are vulnerable, they need our help and protection. There is no scientific evidence that stray dogs or cats can transmit COVID- 19; therefore, we should not be scared or worried that they can pass on the infection to us.

This does not mean that we should not follow the measures recommended by health authorities, such as hand washing.

17. Many temporary shelters seem to be suffering because people are not donating and volunteers are not able to go to the facilities. How can I help?

A side effect of the pandemic is that temporary shelters cannot receive volunteers, funding has been reduced, and people that could adopt are no longer doing so. Due to social distancing, the staff of these temporary shelters is no longer able to carry out vaccination, sterilization or education campaigns.

This is dangerous for animals that depend on these activities for their survival and welfare. Call the shelter to see whether you can adopt an animal for some time (foster home) while you are working from home. Donating food or money is an easy and useful way to help.

Another option is to organize a virtual campaign to raise funds and collect food for the organization caring for animals in your community, since all will need help during the quarantine. You can also create a caretaker network to care for the animals of hospitalized or sick people.

18. I have always allowed my dogs and cats to go freely in the community. Due to the current situation, should I continue letting my dog go out freely or should I keep it in the house?

There is no scientific evidence that indicates the risk of transmission of COVID-19 from dogs or cats. Therefore, if your dog or cat is healthy, sterilized, vaccinated against rabies and you live in a community tolerant of free-roaming, there may not be necessary to impose additional restrictions.

However, it may be that currently, due to lack of knowledge on the nature of coronavirus, some communities do not feel safe around roaming dogs and cats. Only under such circumstances, we recommend applying some restrictions regarding roaming, particularly to ensure the safety of animals.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

- WHO Q&A on coronaviruses (COVID-19) <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>
- CDC-USA If You Have Animals <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/animals.html>
- OIE. Preguntas y respuestas sobre la enfermedad del coronavirus de 2019 (COVID-19) <https://www.oie.int/es/nuestra-experiencia-cientifica/informaciones-especificas-y-recomendaciones/preguntas-y-respuestas-del-nuevo-coronavirus-2019/>
- OIE Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019-novel-coronavirus/>
- COVID-19 – Advice and Resources <https://wsava.org/news/highlighted-news/the-new-coronavirus-and-companion-animals-advice-for-wsava-members/>
- CNN COVID-19 – Advice and Resources <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/02/asia/pets-coronavirus-spread-intl-hnk/index.html>
- Coronavirus can infect cats — dogs, not so much. But scientists say it’s unclear whether felines can spread the virus to people, so pet owners need not panic yet. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00984-8>
- Opinion: Can cats really get or pass on COVID-19, as a report from Belgium suggests? <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/opinion-can-cats-really-get-or-pass-on-covid-19-as-a-report-from-belgium-suggests>
- ICAM answers FAQs on COVID-19 and companion animal population management <https://www.icam-coalition.org/icam-faqs-on-covid-19/>
- USDA Statement on the Confirmation of COVID-19 in a Tiger in New York https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/newsroom/news/sa_by_date/sa-2020/ny-zoo-covid-19
- AVMA SARS-CoV-2 in animals, including pets <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/sars-cov-2-animals-including-pets>
- 5 claves para evitar mordedura de perros <https://www.worldanimalprotection.cr/noticias/5-claves-para-la-prevencion-de-mordeduras>
- WALTHAM® pocket book of human-animal interactions <https://www.waltham.com/dyn/assets/docs/waltham-booklets/human-animal-interactions/human-animalinteractionsbookletelectronicversion.pdf>
- World Animal Protection blog <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org/blogs/should-i-worry-my-dog-has-coronavirus>
- Proteção Animal Mundial - COVID -19 e animais "FAQ" em Português: <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.br/coronavirus-animais>

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