

Advice from the Australian Veterinary Association to pet owners

Client information sheet COVID-19 and companion animals

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that infect birds and mammals, including humans. They are often associated with the common cold, bronchitis and pneumonia, and can also affect the gut. The virus that causes COVID-19 is also a coronavirus and likely originated from a wildlife reservoir.

Canine coronavirus, which can cause diarrhoea, and feline coronavirus, which can cause feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), have been seen by veterinarians for many years. They **do not cause infections in humans**. These coronaviruses are not associated with the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Can COVID-19 infect pets?

There have been reports from Hong Kong that a dog owned by a patient with COVID-19 has tested positive to the presence of the virus in its nose and mouth. This may be a case of human to animal transmission, however the dog's first blood tests have been negative. At this stage there is no evidence that pet dogs or cats are a source of infection to other animals or humans. We are continuing to monitor this situation and will provide updated information as it becomes available.

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 bed.

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. If your pet needs to be seen, your veterinarian will be able to work with you to ensure your pet will receive the care they need, while keeping themselves and their staff safe from COVID-19 infection. If your vet provides house calls, please let them know you are under quarantine **before** they arrive.

If you have any other concerns about your pet, please ask your veterinarian.

Note that this is a rapidly evolving situation and advice provided here is reflective of the evidence at hand (16-03-20). For up to date information on the COVID-19 situation in Australia go to health.gov.au

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