

COVID-19 and your pet: information for pet owners in BC

Updated: April 30, 2020

1. Can my pet get sick with COVID-19?

There have been a small number of reports of cats (domestic cats and a tiger), dogs, and minks that have become infected with the COVID-19 virus after close contact with an infected individual. Experimental studies have shown that cats, ferrets and hamsters are susceptible to infection and disease. At this time, there have been no reports of livestock being infected by COVID-19. This situation is being monitored very closely and any new information on the ability of the virus to cause illness in pets or other domestic animals will be updated as it becomes available.

2. Can pets infect people with the COVID-19 virus?

It is unlikely. There have been no reports of cases where pets or other domestic animals have transmitted the virus to people. The virus that causes COVID-19 most likely originated from an animal source in China, however, it is now spreading from person-to-person when there is direct contact (through droplets from coughing and sneezing or through direct contact with the virus on hands or surfaces) and not from contact with animals.

3. How can I protect my pet if I am infected with COVID-19?

Individuals infected with COVID-19 should limit contact with their pets during their illness. The best option is to have another member of the household care for their animals. If an infected person must care for animals, then they should wash their hands before and after interacting with their animals, their food and supplies. They should avoid close contact with their pet such as snuggling or letting them sleep in their bed. Restrict your animals contact with individual's outside your home until your illness has resolved. If there is no one available to care for your animal (e.g. pet owner is hospitalized and doesn't have a family member to care for their pet), then arrange for temporary housing of your pet at an animal shelter. Shelters should take the necessary precautions when handling pets from COVID-19 positive households.

4. What should I do if my pet becomes ill and was around a person with COVID-19?

If your pet becomes ill after exposure to a person with COVID-19, and you feel you need to take your pet to a veterinary clinic, call your veterinarian and let them know that your sick pet was exposed to a person with COVID-19. Your veterinarian will discuss with you how to manage the situation. Your pet should remain at home to minimize contact with other animals and people. Dogs that may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus should be kept on a leash or within a private fenced area when taken outside for elimination activities, and kept away from other animals and people for 14 days after the start of your pet's illness.

5. Is there a vaccination against COVID-19 that my pet can receive?

No. Currently, there are no vaccines against COVID-19 available for animals. There is absolutely no evidence that vaccinating dogs with commercially available vaccines for other coronaviruses will provide cross-protection against COVID-19.

6. Am I at risk of getting COVID-19 from imported animals? (e.g. a dog imported by a rescue organization)?

There is no evidence that imported pets or other domestic animals can spread the virus to humans. This situation is being monitored very closely and any new information on the risk from imported animals will be updated as it becomes available. However, until we know more, importers, rescue organizations and adoptive families should avoid importing animals from areas where COVID-19 is circulating. If animals are imported from affected areas, they should be closely monitored for signs of illness. If your pet has been imported from an affected area and becomes sick, contact your veterinarian and inform them of the situation. Call ahead to ensure they are aware of the circumstances before taking your pet to a veterinary clinic. The most affected countries are listed by the Public Health Agency of Canada here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/covid-19-affected-areas-list.html>

7. How can I protect my family (human and pet) from COVID-19?

Follow the same advice that public health officials recommend to prevent COVID-19 transmission:

- wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; if soap and water are not available, alcohol based hand rubs can be used to clean your hands as long as they are not visibly soiled;
- avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands;
- regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces;
- follow physical distancing recommendations;
- avoid others who are unwell; and
- stay home when you are sick.

The most important thing you can do to prevent coronavirus and other illnesses is to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face. Cover your mouth when you cough so you're not exposing other people. If you are sick yourself, stay away from others. **If you have COVID-19, or think you might have it, help prevent spreading by following the instructions from the BC Centre for Disease Control:** <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/if-you-are-sick>