Animals and the Coronavirus

Many questions arise due to the new coronavirus and the extraordinary situation – including questions regarding animals.

On April 16, 2020, the Federal Council presented a relaxation of the COVID-19 Ordinance 2 as of April 27, 2020. The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) is currently composing an explanatory commentary which will set the framework for how the regulations are to be understood and implemented and what effects in particular can be expected for the various sectors. The Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) is examining if and how the relaxation affects the treatment and management of animals. As soon as all questions are answered, the FSVO will publish any relevant relaxations on its website in the form of an FAQ.

Stay up to date by checking the FSVO’s website regularly.

Does the new coronavirus pose a threat to cats and dogs?

There is no evidence up to this point suggesting that animals can fall ill with COVID-19. IDEXX, an internationally active analytical laboratory, tested over 4,000 samples from dogs, cats and horses from the USA and South Korea and found no evidence of SARS-CoV-2 in any of the samples. However, we find ourselves in a rapidly advancing process and situational changes must be monitored and examined. In the last few weeks, news got published that two dogs and one cat from different households in Hong Kong whose owners had been infected with SARS-CoV-2 had a weak positive result when tested for the virus by examining a swab from their nasal and oral cavities. The animals did not show any symptoms. A few days ago, the cat of a person in Belgium with COVID-19 tested positive for the virus. The cat did show symptoms of a disease, but it is not in the least clear if the detected virus was in any way connected to the illness or not. A current study from China shows that, under test conditions, cats can be susceptible to the infection and infected animals can transmit the virus to other cats. If and how these results can be applied to cats in their natural environment is not clear yet.

The known dog and cat coronaviruses (canine coronavirus and feline coronavirus) are not the same as the currently circulating SARS-CoV-2 and do not pose any known threat to humans.

Is my pet a potential risk regarding SARS-CoV-2 transmission?

At the moment, there is no evidence suggesting that pets play a significant role in the transmission of COVID-19. In this COVID-19 pandemic, the transmission from human to human is the main way of transmitting and spreading the virus. That is why there is no reason for abandoning or getting rid of pets out of fear of SARS-CoV-2 or euthanizing an animal that was tested positive. However, to reduce the risk of a pathogen transmission between pets and humans, general hygiene measures should be complied with any time you are in contact with pets.
Should I avoid contact with animals if I am sick?
If you have an infectious disease, restricting contact with other living beings is generally advisable. But do make sure that your animals are still properly looked after and taken care of.

What do I need to keep in mind when there is a suspicion that I, an animal owner, might have been infected with SARS-CoV-2 or if I have already been diagnosed positive?
In that situation, it is advised that you check all possible ways of transmission and restrict the contact with other living beings, including pets. The Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) has issued recommendations regarding contact with animals from COVID-19 households (the link for the website can be found below). Should your pet fall ill during your own quarantine and be in need of veterinary help, contact your vet via telephone and explicitly inform them about the quarantine situation in your household.

What do I need to consider when I have contact with the animals of people who have COVID-19?
COVID-19 is transmitted from human to human by way of droplets after sneezing or coughing or by close contact. Some viruses, including the coronaviruses, can also be transmitted indirectly if the virus gets onto an object, where coronaviruses can remain infectious for several days. This can also happen with viruses that go from an infected human onto a pet, which is why it is important to adhere to strict hygiene measures when in contact with animals that live in the same household as an infected person.

Do I have to vaccinate my animal against coronaviruses?
At present, there is no vaccine for COVID-19.

General hygiene measures for the contact with pets
- After contact with the animal, wash your hands thoroughly or disinfect them.
- Don’t let pets sleep in the bedrooms or in the beds of family members.
- No “muzzle-to-mouth” contact with the animal; don’t allow your pet to lick your face and hands. If this does happen, thoroughly wash the affected areas.
- Keep your pets’ beds clean and clean their feeding bowls regularly (in the dishwasher, if possible); clean their toys etc. regularly.

Useful and important information regarding animals and the new coronavirus can be found on the website of the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO):
https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/de/home/das-blv/ausfagsblv/one-health/corona-virus.html#839000738

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