



Animal &  
Plant Health  
Agency

## APHA Briefing Note 10/20

# Advice for Veterinarians and their Clients on Pets and COVID-19

**Date issued: 01 April 2020 - updated 21 May and 27 July 2020**

### Purpose

To provide advice to Veterinarians and their clients on pets and COVID-19.

### General information on pets and COVID-19

We have confirmed historical infection in one cat in the UK, from a household with COVID-19 infected humans. The cat had been co-infected with another respiratory virus but has now made a full recovery. There was no transmission to other cats in the household.

There is no evidence of virus circulating between pets in the UK and we still consider human-to-human transmission is responsible for the burden of disease in the UK. Pets could be a carrier (fomite) of the virus on their fur for short periods of time, just as other surfaces can carry the virus from one place to another.

In line with the general advice on COVID-19, you should wash your hands regularly including before and after you come into contact with animals and pets.

The advice to follow is slightly different depending on your clients' circumstances, so they should follow the advice in <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-with-animals> that is most relevant to their current situation.

### Pets from households with confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19

Government advice is that owners of pets in households with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, who feel their pet may need treatment, should make contact with the practice first and alert them to the household's status. The suggested order of preference for seeking advice or treatment from veterinary practices is set out in the scenarios below, but

it needs to be adapted to the particular circumstances of each case. It is also recognised that there may well be emergency situations such as road traffic accidents, where there may be no option but an urgent visit to the surgery and subsequent hospitalisation, and you may wish to consider how you would apply biosecurity measures at the practice in such circumstances. For further advice on protection of the personal health of practice employees and compliance with RCVS professional Codes, refer to [Public Health England \(PHE\) guidance on infection prevention and control](#) and recent [RCVS advice](#).

Alternatively, and where appropriate, a veterinary telehealth provider may be able to provide advice to a pet owner.

- (a) **Provide telephone advice if appropriate to the situation.** This might allow medication (if needed) to be collected from the surgery, without the need for the animal to attend. However, such collection should not be by any member of a household which is remaining at home due to a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case. They should arrange for the medicine to be collected on their behalf by a friend, neighbour, or family member from an unaffected household. If it is not possible to organise collection, consider posting the medication. In non-urgent cases, it may be possible to defer an examination until the household's 7 or 14 day stay at home period has passed.
- (b) **If the pet needs to visit the surgery.** The pet should not be accompanied by any member of a household who is remaining at home due to a suspect or confirmed COVID-19 case. The owner should arrange for the pet to be brought to the surgery on their behalf by a friend, neighbour or family member from an unaffected household. The handler should wash their hands before and after handling the pet, and may be able to minimise direct contact with the pet by use of a pet carrier.

Consider advising the handler to visit at a quiet time during the day and ask if they can wait in the car park. It may be possible to carry out the consultation with the owner providing input via a telephone. Consider examining the pet outside the main surgery or in an annex away from other clients and pets. To minimise risk of fomite spread from or to the handler, carry out the examination independent of their input with support from practice staff if needed. Before undertaking the examination, make sure you have considered the RCVS Guidance in relation to protecting your and your staff's personal health. Keep in mind risks posed by fomites from items such as a pet carrier and adhere to good hygiene practices, including wearing disposable gloves. Wear an outer garment that is disposable such as an apron, or something which can be replaced and laundered before examining other animals. Carry out appropriate cleaning and disinfection of the annex or other area used to examine the pet before other clients and pets are seen there.

- (c) **If the pet needs to visit the surgery and separate facilities are not available at the premises.** The pet should not be accompanied by any member of a household which is remaining at home due to a suspect or confirmed COVID-19 case. They should arrange for the pet to be brought to the surgery on their behalf by a friend, neighbour, or family member from an unaffected household. The handler should wash their hands before and after handling the pet, and may be able to minimise direct contact with the pet by use of a pet carrier.
- (d) **If it is felt essential to carry out a home visit.** Make sure to adhere to RCVS Guidance in considering you and your staff's personal health. A home visit can allow the owner to be present but without them having to attend the surgery. If there is a yard, garage, shed or garden you should consider the possibility and practicality of carrying out the consultation there, which means you do not have to enter the premises. If you as the attending veterinarian, along with any support staff, feel it is essential to carry out the consultation in the house, you should consult the [Public Health England \(PHE\) guidance](#) on infection prevention and control which would apply to healthcare workers in similar situations.

A further option may be to consider using a member of the practice staff to collect the pet from the household and return it, and doing the consultation in the surgery whilst speaking to the owner over the phone. Keep in mind risks posed by fomites from items such as a pet carrier or other items from a self-isolating household. Adhere to good hygiene practices, including wearing disposable gloves. Wear an outer garment that is disposable such as an apron, or something which can be replaced and laundered before examining other animals. Carry out appropriate cleaning and disinfection of the consulting room before other clients and pets are seen.

- (e) **If, despite Government advice, a pet owner who should be in self-isolation visits the surgery without calling in advance.** This may occur in the case of a veterinary emergency such as a road traffic accident, so ensure you to adhere to RCVS Guidance in considering you and your staff's personal health. Consider if there are any social distancing steps you and your staff can take during the visit. Adhere to good hygiene practices, including wearing disposable gloves and an outer garment that is disposable such as an apron, or something which can be replaced and laundered before examining other animals. Keep in mind risks posed by fomites from items such as a pet carrier or other items from a self-isolating household. Carry out appropriate cleaning and disinfection of the consulting room before other clients and pets are seen.

## PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)

If for any reason PPE is required for the scenarios outlined above, you should follow the [PHE infection prevention and control guide](#).

## Cleansing and Disinfection

Cleansing and disinfection of equipment and structures in the practice should be undertaken using the cleaning and virucidal disinfectants that you currently use around the practice. These should be effective against SARS-CoV-2. If this advice changes we will update this guidance.

Pet owners and anyone handling pets should observe normal hygiene measures after handling pets as the animal could potentially carry the virus on its fur after being touched by a person with COVID-19, in the same way that any other object or surface can.

DO NOT use household and commercial, cleaning products, anti-viral sprays or wipes or other disinfectants on pets. Only use products designed for use on animals as directed to do so by your veterinary surgeon.

COVID-19 has resulted in the increased use of disinfectants, hand gels and other cleaning products among the general public including pet owners. Veterinarians and owners should be aware of the risks of exposure to hazardous disinfectants and cleaning products and that pets may be at an increased risk of exposure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many disinfectants and cleaning products including hand sanitisers and wipes can be harmful to animals if they come into contact with their skin or ingest them, either directly or by licking them off their fur or another surface they come into contact with including your hands. In particular, those products containing cationic surfactants such as benzalkonium chloride, which is a common ingredient in many household disinfectants (and patio cleaners) are a danger to pets.

There is no scientific evidence that washing animals is necessary to control the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

If owners wish to wash their pet, they should use a pet-safe shampoo, following the manufacturer's instructions. Too-frequent bathing can be detrimental to their pets' skin and coat.

For households with pets where people have confirmed or suspected COVID-19, pet bedding and other items such as leads or bowls should be cleaned in the same way as other parts of the household. Guidance can be found on the PHE website titled "[COVID-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings](#)".

If owners or veterinarians are worried about any chemicals or other substances their pet or their clients' pets have come into contact with, they should call their veterinary surgeon or the Animal Poison Line on 01202 509000 (fees may be charged) for advice.

## Potential clinical signs and treatment

There are a small number of reports that some animals have become infected with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (the causative agent of COVID-19) following close contact with infected humans (a reverse zoonosis).

We have confirmed historical infection in one cat in the UK, from a household with COVID-19 infected humans. The cat had been co-infected with another respiratory virus but has now made a full recovery. There was no transmission to other cats in the household. There is no evidence of virus circulating between pets in the UK and we still consider human-to-human transmission is responsible for the burden of disease in the UK.

Some of the animals which have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 to date have shown mild respiratory signs, sometimes with gastrointestinal distress, fever and lethargy. In the absence of a specific treatment for the virus, the detection of SARS-CoV-2 in animals does not alter case management. Symptomatic treatment should be pursued as appropriate for the presenting clinical signs. For further information of the case definition, based on current scientific knowledge, for SARS-CoV-2 infection in animals please see:

[APHA Briefing Note 18/20 SARS-CoV-2 in Animals – Case Definition, Testing and International Reporting Obligations](#)

## Caring for sick pets in households where individuals are self-isolating

Sick pets resident in households undergoing [self-isolation](#) should be cared for at home in the usual way. This will normally be by the owners if their symptoms are mild and they have not required hospitalisation, or by asymptomatic family members who are remaining in the house, even if some family members have been hospitalised.

Where pets have been left alone due to the hospitalisation of their owners due to COVID-19, you should refer the case to the owner's Local Authority. However, you may be asked to provide veterinary advice on what is best for the animal's health and welfare in these circumstances.

## Advice where pet owners are in vulnerable groups

You may have pet owner clients who are social distancing to protect their own health (as opposed to minimising the spread of the virus). To support these clients, consider organising collection or posting of medication. A friend or relative may be able to visit the practice with the pet. However, if this is not possible, consider other ways in which you may be able to support the owner and pet such as:

- Advising the owner to wait in the car outside
- Visiting at a quiet time of the day
- Planning consultations with extra time either side
- Carrying out the consultation without the owner being present with their input via a telephone conversation
- Organising a home visit.