

Q&A REGARDING COVID-19 FOR ANIMAL OWNERS

Version 05.11.20

SECTION A: GENERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING ANIMALS

Q1. Can COVID-19 virus affect animals?

Only a very small number of pets or other animals have tested positive for COVID-19. These animals have lived in the same households or in very close proximity to people infected with COVID-19.

Some species of animals appear susceptible to the SARS-CoV-2 virus which causes COVID-19 including dogs, cats (domestic and wild cat species), ferrets and mink. However, the numbers of animals that have tested positive for the disease worldwide remain very low. Cats appear more likely to display clinical signs of COVID-19 than dogs and can show respiratory and digestive tract signs.

Q2. Can animals spread the COVID-19 virus to humans?

Whilst it is speculated that COVID-19 originally spread from wild animals to humans, there were 2 suspected reports in the Netherlands where it is suspected that COVID-19 may have spread from mink to humans.

The exact origin of the outbreak of COVID-19 virus in the city of Wuhan in China in December 2019 is still unknown. Although scientific analysis of the viral molecule indicates that initial transmission to humans may have come from a wild animal source such as bats, the exact pathway has not been identified. Most recently, in Denmark, a new variant of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus which causes COVID-19 in humans) has been confirmed in a small number of farms and people. As a result, Danish authorities have decided to humanely destroy all mink on public health grounds, due to the concern that the new variant produces a reduced antibody response, this may have implications for the efficacy of vaccines in development for COVID-19. It is worth noting that currently, there is no evidence to suggest that animals infected by humans are playing a **significant** role in the epidemiology of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Outbreaks of COVID-19 in humans are driven by person to person transmission.

Q3. Can the virus that causes COVID-19 be transmitted to humans through food?

There is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be spread through the consumption of food according to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

There are no cases of COVID-19 to date that have shown that they were infected through the consumption of contaminated food. In previous human coronavirus epidemics, food was not found to be a source of infection. However, surface contamination of food with the virus through sneezing or coughing for example is possible. It is important to observe good hygienic precautions when preparing food.

Q4. Do I need to take precautions when handling animals where there are no known cases of COVID-19 in my household?

Basic hygiene precautions should always be taken when handling animals, including regular handwashing, because animals can pass other diseases to humans, known as zoonotic diseases.

Q5. Can I exercise my companion animal outdoors if there is no case of COVID-19 in my household?

Exercise outdoors (within 5km of your home) with your companion animal is permitted during Level 5 restrictions while observing HSE guidelines, maintaining a social distance of 2 metres or more from other people. People are advised to wear face coverings in places where it is difficult to maintain social distancing.

Animals exercised outdoors under these guidelines should be kept on a lead and at least 2 metres away from other people and their pets. Animal faeces should be hygienically removed from the environment.

Q6. Can I exercise my companion animal outdoors if I am in an at-risk group or cocooning?

The current recommendation is that extremely vulnerable people cocoon by staying at home as much as possible and take additional precautions if meeting people. People who are cocooning may now bring their pets for short walks but it is imperative that they follow all of the including social distancing of 2 metres or more, handwashing etc. and stay within 5km of your home. If you arrange for someone else to exercise your pet, then ensure that you maintain a social distance of 2 metres or more from the person who is exercising your pet and avoid contact with equipment used to exercise the dog e.g. lead etc.

Animals exercised outdoors under these guidelines should be kept on a lead, and faeces should be hygienically removed from the environment, as usual. You may also let your dog out to the back garden for exercise and toilet if the garden is well fenced. If your cat is usually kept indoors keep them inside and hygienically clean their litter tray regularly.

Q7. What if my animal requires veterinary attention and there is no case of COVID-19 in my household?

Veterinary practices are essential services to safeguard animal health and welfare and they and their staff need to be protected from possible exposure to COVID-19. Arrangements for the care of your animal should be made in consultation with your veterinary practitioner.

Telephone the veterinary practice to make the appropriate arrangements in advance. Observe both the [HSE guidelines](#) and biosecurity protocols which the veterinary practice may have put in place for the protection of human health.

SECTION B: QUESTIONS OF RELEVANCE TO A HOUSEHOLD WITH A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19

Q8. Do I need to avoid contact with companion animals or livestock if I am infected with COVID-19?

Yes, it is best that you do. The HSE currently advise that people infected with COVID-19 or self-isolating should remain indoors. Arrangements should be made for someone else to care for your animals.

There have been reports of a small number of instances where pets, mink and zoo animals have become infected with COVID-19 virus and it would be sensible to take precautions until further information is available. People who test positive for COVID-19 should avoid close contact with animals and organise for someone else to care for all animals including livestock and pets.

If this is not possible, such as in the case of household pets, take additional precautions such as minimising close contact with companion animals and do not allow companion animals to lick you. Wash hands before and after any interaction with your pet animal and wear a facemask if possible. It is imperative that animal welfare standards are maintained and that animals in affected households are properly cared for.

Q9. Can I exercise my companion animal if I am infected with COVID-19 or self-isolating?

No. The HSE currently advise that people infected with COVID-19 virus or self-isolating should remain indoors, so it is not advisable for you to bring your pet outdoors for exercise during this time.

Dogs can be let outside into your garden for exercise and toilet if your garden is well fenced. If your cat is usually kept indoors keep them inside and hygienically clean their litter tray regularly.

Q10. Can I exercise my companion animal if I am restricting my movements in line with HSE guidelines?

The HSE currently advise that people restricting their movements in line with [HSE guidelines](#) can still go outside briefly for walks or runs on their own with a dog provided you keep at least 2 metres distance from other and keep away from older people, anyone with long-term medical conditions and pregnant women

Dogs should be kept on a lead and faeces hygienically removed from the environment, as usual.

Q11. What if my animal requires veterinary attention and I am infected with COVID-19, self-isolating or I am restricting my movements in line with HSE guidelines?

Veterinary practices are essential services to safeguard animal health and welfare and they and their staff need to be protected from possible exposure to COVID-19 virus. As such it is important that people who are infected with COVID-19, self-isolating or restricting their movements in line with HSE guidelines follow HSE advice and do not bring their animals to a veterinary practice themselves.

Alternative arrangements should be made in order to obtain veterinary care for your animal in consultation with your veterinary practitioner – this could include arranging for someone who is not restricted or infected with COVID-19 or self-isolating or in a vulnerable category to bring the animal to the practice for you. **Telephone the veterinary practice to make the appropriate arrangements in advance.** Observe both the [HSE guidelines](#) and biosecurity protocols which the veterinary practice may have put in place for the protection of human health.

Q12. How will I manage my Bovine TB test if I am infected with COVID-19?

The HSE currently advise that people infected with COVID-19 virus or self-isolating should remain indoors. People who are infected with COVID-19, self-isolating or restricting their movements in line with HSE guidelines should avoid contact with livestock.

DAFM has issued guidance on TB testing during this ongoing COVID situation. The current advice can be accessed here <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrol/bovinetb/covid-19contingencies/>

Q13. Can I get my animals tested for COVID-19?

No. Priority is being given to the use of the tests for people.

SECTION C: FURTHER INFORMATION

Information provided above is current and may be subject to change as further information becomes available. The following websites provide additional information on COVID-19 and are frequently updated:

[Health Service Executive – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Health Protection Surveillance Centre - Novel Coronavirus](#)

[Questions and Answers on the COVID-19: OIE - World Organisation for Animal Health \(OIE\)](#)

[European Centre for Disease Control \(ECDC\) - COVID-19](#)

[Veterinary Council of Ireland](#)