

AVMA statement on Bronx Zoo tiger testing positive for COVID-19 virus; What it means for pet owners

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) is aware that the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories has also confirmed the presence of SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19, in one tiger at a zoo in New York. This is the first instance of a tiger being infected with COVID-19. Several lions and tigers at the zoo showed clinical signs of respiratory illness and this tiger was tested accordingly. Public health employees believe the large cats became ill after being exposed to a zoo employee who was actively shedding virus. All of the large cats are expected to recover. No other animals in other areas of the zoo are exhibiting similar clinical signs.

There have been no reports of pets or livestock becoming ill with COVID-19 in the United States, and only four reported cases in the world of dogs and cats testing positive for the virus. **At this point in time, there is no evidence that domestic animals, including pets and livestock, can spread COVID-19 to people.**

What does this mean for pet owners?

Nothing about this case changes AVMA's ongoing recommendation that, out of an abundance of caution, and until more is known about this virus, you should restrict contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just as you would restrict contact with other people. When possible, have another member of your household or business take care of feeding and otherwise caring for any animals. If you have a service animal or you must care for your animals, including pets, wear a cloth facemask; don't share food, kiss, or hug them; and wash your hands before and after any contact with them.

If you are not ill with COVID-19, you can interact with your pet as you normally would, including walking, feeding, and playing.

You should continue to practice good hygiene during those interactions (e.g., wash hands before and after interacting with your pet, including when handling food, supplies, and waste; ensure your pet is kept clean; regularly wash your pet's food and water bowls, bedding material, and toys).

U.S. Department of Agriculture offers this comprehensive statement with FAQ's:

(Washington, D.C. April 5, 2020) – The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratories has confirmed SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 in humans) in one tiger at a zoo in New York. This is the first instance of a tiger being infected with COVID-19. Samples from this tiger were taken and tested after several lions and tigers at the zoo showed symptoms of respiratory illness.

Public health officials believe these large cats became sick after being exposed to a zoo employee who was actively shedding virus. The zoo has been closed to the public since mid-March, and the first tiger began showing signs of sickness on March 27. All of these large cats are expected to recover. There is no evidence that other animals in other areas of the zoo are showing symptoms.

USDA and CDC are monitoring the situation and working to support the state and local health departments and state animal health officials. State animal and public health officials will take the lead in making determinations about whether animals, either at this zoo or in other areas, should be tested for the SARS-CoV-2 virus. USDA will notify the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) of this finding.

Anyone sick with COVID-19 should restrict contact with animals, out of an abundance of caution including pets, during their illness, just as they would with other people. Although there have not been reports of pets becoming sick with COVID-19 in the United States, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. If a sick person must care for a pet or be around animals, they should wash their hands before and after the interaction.

Questions and Answers:

Can people give this virus to animals and, if so, what animals are at risk?

This is the first case of its kind. We are still learning about this new coronavirus and how it spreads. This case suggests that a zoo employee spread the virus to the tiger. Further studies are needed to understand if and how different animals could be affected by COVID-19. State animal and public health officials will continue to work closely with USDA and CDC to monitor this situation and will conduct additional testing if it is warranted.

If multiple animals were showing symptoms, why was only one tested?

Only one tiger was tested as the collection of diagnostic samples in big cats requires general anesthesia. Since all tigers and lions were exhibiting similar respiratory symptoms, the attending veterinarian felt it was in the best interest of the animals to limit the potential risks of general anesthesia to one tiger for diagnostics.

If animals can catch the virus, can they give it back to people?

At this time, there is no evidence to suggest that any animals, including pets or livestock, can spread COVID-19 infection to people.

Will this finding prompt additional testing of animals?

No. This is an evolving situation, however, routine testing of zoo or personal animals is not recommended at this time. Public and animal health officials may decide to test certain animals that are showing signs of illness and that are known to have been exposed to the virus. More information about how those decisions will be made is available here:

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/faq-public-on-compani-on-animal-testing.pdf

Should any animal showing signs of respiratory illness be tested?

USDA and CDC do not recommend routine testing of animals for this virus. Because the situation is ever-evolving, public and animal health officials may decide to test certain animals out of an abundance of caution. The decision to test will be made collaboratively between local, state or federal public and animal health officials.

Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I am sick from coronavirus (COVID-19)?

You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would with other people. Although there have not been reports of pets becoming sick with COVID-19 in the United States, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick. If you are sick with COVID-19, avoid contact with your pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets.

More information is available on how to keep people and animals safe at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>

What should I do if I think my animal has the virus?

Call your veterinary clinic with any questions about your animal's health. In order to ensure the veterinary clinic is prepared for the household animal, the owner should call ahead and arrange the hospital or clinic visit. Make sure to tell your veterinarian if your animal was exposed to a person sick with COVID-19, and if your animal is showing any signs of illness. Veterinarians who believe an animal should be tested will contact state animal health officials, who will work with public and animal health authorities to decide whether samples should be collected and tested.

Could this affect tigers or other animals at other zoos across the United States?

There is no evidence of this virus affecting animals at any other facilities in the United States. However, anyone sick with COVID-19 should restrict contact with animals, including pets, during their illness, just as they would with other people. Although there have not been reports of pets becoming sick with COVID-19 in the United States, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. If a sick person must care for a pet or be around animals, they should wash their hands before and after the interaction.