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ANIMAL HEALTH
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**Interim Guidance for Maine Veterinarians:
SARS-CoV-2 (causative agent for human CoVID-19) Testing in Animals**

Key Points About SARS-CoV-2 and Animals, from US CDC's One Health Coronavirus Task Force:

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause illness in people, and others cause illness in certain types of animals.
- Some coronaviruses that infect animals can sometimes be spread to people, but this is rare.
- We do not know the exact source of the current outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The first infections were thought to be linked to a live animal market, but the virus is now primarily spreading from person to person.
- The first case of an animal testing positive for the virus in the United States was a tiger that had a respiratory illness at a zoo in New York City.
- We do not have evidence that companion animals, including pets, can spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to people or that they might be a source of infection in the United States.
- CDC is aware of a very small number of pets outside the United States [reportedexternal icon](#) to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 after close contact with people with COVID-19.
- Treat pets as you would other human family members – do not let pets interact with people or animals outside the household. If a person inside the household becomes sick, isolate that person from everyone else, including pets.
- Further studies are needed to understand if and how different animals could be affected by the virus that causes COVID-19 as well as how this might affect human health.
- This is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be updated as it becomes available.
- For more information, see [COVID-19 and Animals Frequently Asked Questions](#)

No animal testing shall be done without the advance approval of the Office of the Maine State Veterinarian and consultation with the Maine State Epidemiologist.

Requests for consideration for testing should be submitted in writing via the completion of the Maine Reportable Animal Disease form:

https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ahw/animal_health/disease_reporting_form.shtml

Only symptomatic pets from a confirmed or highly suspicious positive household for COVID 19 will be considered for testing.

The purpose of this document is to describe the most likely justifications for SARS-CoV-2 testing and provide guidance to veterinary practitioners seeking permission to submit samples for testing.

The current spread of COVID-19 is a result of person-to-person transmission. Pets have not been associated with spread of the disease to humans anywhere in the world, although there have been rare reports of virus detection in companion animals and wildlife associated with close contact from infected people. This pattern indicates that animals are not likely to be a significant contributor to the spread of COVID 19.

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As a result, *animal testing should be minimized* to conserve both test reagents and personal protective equipment (PPE) desperately needed to manage the human pandemic, and to avoid unnecessary abandonment of pets and possible additional exposure of animal sample collectors to COVID-positive environments.

Routine testing of animals for COVID 19 is not recommended; however, there may be limited situations in which testing of animals would be appropriate. USDA's National Veterinary Service Laboratory (NVSL), and some labs within the USDA National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN), have the ability to test animals for the COVID-19 outbreak's causative agent, SARS-CoV-2, **and are the preferred destination for animal samples**, if warranted. **Please be aware that any SARS-CoV-2 test run at a private lab offering testing must be confirmed at NVSL**, which will likely require collection of additional samples, which consumes limited supplies (swabs, PPE) and potentially exposes more people to this virus.

These guidelines shall apply to all SARS-COV-2 testing proposed for domestic animals within the State of Maine, regardless of the location of the testing laboratory. These recommendations will be updated as new information becomes available.

Veterinarians must rule out other, more common causes of illness in animals before requesting consideration for SARS-CoV-2 testing. Negative test results for more common respiratory diseases of animals should be submitted as part of request for approval to test for SARS-CoV-2.

Veterinarians should use their best judgment to determine if an animal has been exposed to people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and if the animal has clinical signs compatible with SARS-CoV-2 infection.

- Testing may be considered under the following circumstances:
 - A. In consultation with State of Maine veterinary and human public health officials when **all** the following occur:
 1. The animal has current signs of clinical illness, including a documented fever, and;
 2. The animal had direct contact with a symptomatic confirmed COVID-19 case-patient in the two weeks preceding the animal's onset of illness, and;
 3. The animal's test results have direct implications for potential ongoing risk of disease transmission to susceptible humans.
 - B. To confirm positive results from tests conducted *without regulatory approval, which is strongly discouraged*, at private, academic, or other unofficial laboratories
 1. Laboratories and submitting veterinarians should report results to the ME DACF State Veterinarian/Public Health Veterinarian (michele.walsh@maine.gov, 207-215-6727) within one working day to coordinate confirmatory testing.
 2. Any positive test results obtained without prior regulatory approval will require a confirmatory test at USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL).
 - C. When, in the opinion of state and/or federal public health officials, the animal presents a unique opportunity to gain further insight into SARS-CoV2 epidemiology.

Again, requests for SARS-CoV-2 testing of an animal shall be made in writing to the Office of the State Veterinarian, via this [form](#). During normal business hours, the State Veterinarian can be reached for questions at (207) 215-6727 or michele.walsh@maine.gov. After hours emergency requests can be directed to the Maine Center for Disease Control epidemiologist on call at (800) 821-5821.

- **Requests should contain the following information:**
 - A. Animal owner's name, address, email address, and phone number
 - B. Animal's name, species, age, sex

- C. Animal's location if different from the owner's address
- D. Veterinarian's reason for testing the animal(s)
- E. Findings of physical, radiographic, or sonographic examinations and any relevant lab results
- F. Complete patient history

Official sampling of animals approved for testing will be performed by an USDA accredited veterinarian, or a State or Federal veterinarian, per USDA guidelines:

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

Limited information is currently available to characterize SARS-CoV-2 infection in animals; please visit [CDC's COVID-19 and Animals page](#) for the most up-to-date information. Clinical criteria for considering testing for SARS-CoV-2 in animals is based on what is currently known about SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 and is subject to change as additional information becomes available. The CDC currently offers these [guidelines](#) for evaluation for SARS -CoV-2 testing in animals.

References:

United States Department of Agriculture:

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

Centers for Disease Control:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/interim-guidance-managing-people-in-home-care-and-isolation-who-have-pets.html>

American Veterinary Medical Association:

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19>