



First Animal Confirmed with SARS-CoV-2 in Virginia

January 8, 2021

Dear Colleague:

The USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories confirmed on December 31, 2020 that a Virginia cat tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 in people. On December 18, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) was notified by Virginia Tech Animal Laboratory Services (VITALS) at the Virginia Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (VMCVM) at Virginia Tech of an adult cat from the Northwest Region of Virginia that presented to VMCVM for post-mortem examination. This cat had a pre-existing cardiac condition and was euthanized due to progressive respiratory distress. After consultation with VDH, it was decided to test the cat for SARS-CoV-2. Specimens were submitted to the Cornell University Animal Health Diagnostic Center (AHDC) for testing, where SARS-CoV-2 was initially detected.

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine initiated a joint public health and animal health investigation based on presumptive positive results from AHDC. At this time, it is believed that the cat became ill after being in close contact with people sick with COVID-19. Based on information available to date, it appears that the virus can spread from people to animals in some situations.

A person in the household became ill on December 4 and tested antigen positive for COVID-19 on December 5. The cat, a four-year-old male, neutered domestic medium-hair, became ill on or about December 7. According to the owner, the initial sign of illness in the cat was a decreased appetite. He then started becoming lethargic on December 11 and developed respiratory distress beginning on December 13. Because of his progressive and severe respiratory distress, this cat was humanely euthanized on December 15. While a hypertrophic cardiomyopathy was identified postmortem, there is an on-going animal health investigation into how the concurrent SARS-CoV-2 infection may have affected this animal's clinical outcome.

To date, there is no evidence that companion animals play a significant role in spreading SARS-CoV-2. Based on the limited data available, the risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low. Routine testing of animals for SARS-CoV-2 is currently not recommended.

The clinical spectrum of illness for SARS-CoV-2 remains largely undefined in animals. Animals may present with respiratory or gastrointestinal clinical signs based on the presentation of other coronaviruses more commonly found in animals as well as other emerging coronaviruses, including

SARS-CoV-1 infection. Clinical signs expected to be compatible with possible SARS-CoV-2 infection in mammalian animals may include fever, coughing, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, lethargy, sneezing, nasal and ocular discharge, vomiting, and diarrhea. These clinical signs may mirror many other more common animal diseases. Given the rare reports of SARS-CoV-2 infections in animals, veterinarians are encouraged to:

- take a thorough history to assess for likely COVID-19 exposure or risk factors in the two weeks prior to symptom onset, such as whether an animal has been in contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 or an animal diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2 infection, a person with COVID-19 compatible symptoms, or has had recent exposure to a known high-risk environment, such as a nursing home; and
- perform a thorough medical evaluation of sick animals, including diagnostic testing for more common causes of illness consistent with species and clinical presentation.

Veterinarians who have evaluated an animal and are concerned that SARS-CoV-2 testing may be indicated are encouraged to contact Virginia's veterinary public health officials (at julia.murphy@vdh.virginia.gov or brandy.darby@vdh.virginia.gov) or the Office of the State Veterinarian (carolynn.bissett@vdacs.virginia.gov) to discuss the case. If the decision is made to test, based on the clinical presentation of the animal and evidence of an epidemiologic exposure to COVID-19, Virginia veterinary public health officials and animal health officials can provide guidance as to appropriate samples for collection, personal protective equipment necessary for sample collection and where samples can be sent for initial testing.

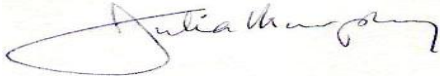
As a reminder, the Virginia Department of Health recommends that people with confirmed COVID-19, or those with similar [signs and symptoms](#), restrict contact with pets and other animals while sick, just as they would isolate themselves from other people. Although reports of animals becoming sick with COVID-19 are rare, it is recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit their contact with mammalian animals until more is known about the virus. This includes avoiding contact such as petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food while sick. Whenever possible, have a healthy member of the household care for the animal(s). People with confirmed COVID-19, or those with similar signs and symptoms, can resume contact with their animals [when their home isolation ends](#).

VDH would also like to remind veterinarians of resources available to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- [VDH COVID-19 Resources for Health Professional: Veterinarians](#)
 - A “one-stop shop” for resources available to veterinarians, including scientific information for the veterinary community and client factsheets that can be shared with the general public. A few resources of interest are also highlighted below:
 - [Testing and Management of an Animal Positive for SARS-CoV-2 in VA](#)
 - [VDH: Animals and COVID-19 FAQs](#)
 - [VDH: Information for Veterinarians](#)
 - [CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Veterinary Clinics Treating Companion Animals During the COVID-19 Response](#)

Thank you for everything you are doing every day to help keep the people and animals of Virginia healthy and safe during these trying times.

Sincerely,



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