What is COVID-19?

This is a newly identified virus in the corona virus group. It is closely related to a couple of other corona virus outbreaks we have seen recently; namely SARS and MERS. COVID-19 is more distantly related to the other corona viruses most familiar to pet owners. Those are the virus which causes Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) and the Canine Coronavirus (CCoV) which causes digestive tract disease in dogs.

Can pets be infected with corona virus?

Most recent research has identified COVID-19 infections in cats, ferrets and tigers at the Bronx Zoo. At this time, it is not thought that infected cats are a significant risk factor for human disease while the tigers at the zoo appear to have been infected from a pre-symptomatic caretaker. Dogs have not been identified as infected or carriers of the virus. It is very early in the disease cycle and more research is needed to understand this virus.

Can people become infected from dogs and cats?

At this time there is no evidence that dogs can transmit this disease to humans. Although cats can be infected the risk from house cats seems to be very low. It is possible that pets, as with door handles and other objects, can act as fomites and carry virus on their fur for short periods of time but the pet would need to have had very close contact with an infected person for this to occur. Person to person contact is the most significant way the virus is spread in society.

If my pet shows signs of illness, such as coughing, sneezing and fever should I have it tested?

Current expert understanding is that COVID-19 is primarily transmitted person-to-person. This supports a recommendation against testing of domestic animals, except by official order. If domestic animals, including dogs or cats, present with respiratory or gastrointestinal signs, veterinarians should test for the more common pathogens and conditions.

What about COVID-19 and bowel movements?

Experimental exposure to corona virus in cats has identified virus in feces but the data is limited at this time. Owners should use caution and wear gloves when cleaning the litterbox and avoid any direct contact with the litterbox contents. Remember you can be exposed to other pathogens, such as toxoplasmosis, when cleaning the box.

Can I give my dog a bath?

Generally speaking, yes. There is no reason to think that domestic animals, including pets, in the United States might be a source of infection with the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Can my dog play with other dogs?

If you are referring to dog parks and such… No, YOU are supposed to be staying home and keeping a safe, social distance from other people.

What should I do with my pet if I have been potentially exposed to this corona virus or have become ill with symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath)?

Let’s look at the first situation. At this point there is no real concern for your pet, but you should consider wearing a face mask and avoiding direct contact with your pet. The same precautions you would have around other people. But, as a responsible pet owner, you should have a back-up plan for animal care should you become ill yourself; enough pet food and someone you can count on to provide care if you become too ill yourself.

In the event you become physically ill with COVID-19 symptoms, this is when your back-up plan takes effect. A trusted family member or friend should be called upon to render assistance. While avoiding direct contact with the pet for the first few days, this person should provide board and care for your pet. And remember however, that the probability of anyone contracting the virus from any pet is absolutely minimal.

For a much more detailed summary of current COVID-19 knowledge from the AVMA please access: https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/sars-cov-2-animals-including-pets