

## COVID-19 Advice for Pet Owners

Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding best practices for pets during this time focuses on social distancing, similar to what people should be doing. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and CDC has some information available on this topic, which are shared below. Please note that the terms “SARS-CoV-2” and “COVID-19” can be understood to mean the same thing for the purposes of this pet-related information.

### Key Takeaways:

- It’s always a good idea to wash your hands before and after interacting with animals
- Ensure your pet is kept well-groomed
- Regularly clean your pet’s food and water bowls, bedding material, and toys.

### Helpful Links:

- [https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/covid-19-faq-pet-owners\\_031520.pdf](https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/covid-19-faq-pet-owners_031520.pdf)
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/animals.html>

### Frequently Asked Questions answered by CDC/AVMA

#### **Q: Can SARS-CoV-2 infect pets and can it be spread by pets to other animals, including people?**

A: We do not have a clear answer as to whether SARS-CoV-2 can infect pets at this time. That said, currently, there is no evidence that pets become sick. Infectious disease experts, as well as the CDC, OIE, and WHO indicate there is also no evidence to suggest that pet dogs or cats can be a source of infection with SARS-CoV-2, including spreading COVID-19 to people. More investigation is underway and, as we learn more, information will be posted. However, because animals can spread other diseases to people and people can also spread diseases to animals, it’s a good idea to always wash your hands before and after interacting with animals.

#### **Q: Can pets serve as fomites in the spread of COVID-19?**

A: COVID-19 appears to be primarily transmitted by contact with an infected person’s bodily secretions, such as saliva or mucus droplets in a cough or sneeze. COVID-19 might be able to be transmitted by touching a contaminated surface or object (i.e., a fomite) and then touching the mouth, nose, or possibly eyes, but this appears to be a secondary route. Smooth (non-porous) surfaces (e.g., countertops, door knobs) transmit viruses better than porous materials (e.g., paper money, pet fur), because porous, and especially fibrous, materials absorb and trap the pathogen (virus), making it harder to contract through simple touch. Because your pet’s hair is porous and also fibrous, it is very unlikely that you would contract COVID-19 by petting or playing with your pet. However, because animals can spread other diseases to people and people can also spread diseases to animals, it’s always a good idea to wash your hands before and after interacting with animals; ensure your pet is kept well-groomed; and regularly clean your pet’s food and water bowls, bedding material, and toys.

#### **Q: If I am ill with COVID-19 are there special precautions I should take to prevent spreading disease, including when caring for my pet?**

A: If you are sick with COVID-19 you need to be careful to avoid transmitting it to other people. Applying some common-sense measures can help prevent that from happening. Stay at home except to get medical care and call ahead before visiting your doctor. Minimize your contact with other people, including separating yourself from other members of your household who are not ill; using a different bathroom, if available; and wearing a facemask when you are around other people or pets and before you enter a healthcare provider’s office. Wash your hands often, especially before touching your face, and use hand sanitizer. Use a tissue if you need to cough or sneeze and dispose of that tissue in the trash. When coughing or sneezing, do so into your elbow or sleeve rather than directly

at another person. Out of an abundance of caution, the AVMA recommends you take the same common-sense approach when interacting with your pets or other animals in your home, including service animals. You should tell your physician and public health official that you have a pet or other animal in your home. Although there have not been reports of pets becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. So, if you are ill with COVID-19, have another member of your household take care of walking, feeding, and playing with your pet. If you have a service animal or you must care for your pet, then wear a face mask; don't share food, kiss, or hug them; and wash your hands before and after any contact with your pet or service animal. You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. While we are recommending these as good practices, it is important to remember there is currently no evidence that pets can spread COVID-19 to other animals, including people.

**Q: What should I do to prepare for my pet's care in the event I do become ill?**

A: Identify another person in your household who is willing and able to care for your pet in your home should you contract COVID-19. Make sure you have an emergency kit prepared, with at least two weeks' worth of your pet's food and any needed medications. Usually we think about emergency kits like this in terms of what might be needed for an evacuation, but it's also good to have one prepared in the case of quarantine or self-isolation when you cannot leave your home.

**Q: My pet or service animal is not ill but has a scheduled appointment at the veterinarian and I am not ill with COVID-19 – what should I do?**

A: If you are not ill with COVID-19 or another communicable disease (e.g., cold, flu), and your pet is not ill, call your veterinarian to discuss the need for an appointment. Given current efforts to reduce the potential for human exposure to COVID-19, including recommendations for social distancing, your veterinarian may recommend postponing elective visits or procedures (e.g., wellness visits, vaccination visits, and routine dentals). If you would prefer to remain in your home and you have an established relationship with the veterinarian (i.e., they have seen your pet/service animal in the recent past), telemedicine might be an excellent way to conduct your visit, depending on what services are required. Your veterinarian can help you determine what kind of appointment might work best for you and your pet/service animal in your particular situation.

**Q: My pet or service animal needs to go to the veterinarian and I am ill with COVID-19 – what should I do?**

A: If you are sick with COVID-19 or another communicable disease, you should stay at home, minimizing contact with other people, until you are well. Accordingly, if this is a non-urgent appointment that needs to be scheduled for your pet or service animal (e.g., annual wellness examination, routine vaccination, elective surgery), you should wait to schedule that appointment until your physician and/or your public health official believe you no longer present a risk of transmitting your infection to other people you may encounter during such a visit, including owners of pets or other animals and veterinary clinic staff. If you are sick with COVID-19, and you believe your pet or service animal is ill, you should seek assistance from your veterinarian to determine how to best ensure your pet or service animal can be appropriately cared for while minimizing risks of transmitting COVID-19 to other people. Don't forget – if you have an established relationship with your veterinarian (i.e., they have seen your pet/service animal in the recent past), telemedicine can be an excellent way to connect you, your pet/service animal, and your veterinarian. It can be used to help determine the urgency with which an animal needs to be seen and can also be used to conduct rechecks of certain types of ongoing medical problems. Be sure to contact your veterinarian before heading to the veterinary hospital to see what they recommend for your particular situation.