



Health Management for People and Pets during COVID-19

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During the present worldwide pandemic, companies are marketing to the heightened public anxiety about SARS-CoV-2 and its disease COVID-19 [1]. These concerns not only affect human populations but also impact upon the companion animal pets that share their lives. Commercial companies are profiting from selling a myriad of safety and sanitizing supplies as well pet face coverings. One pet mask company reported that sales spiked 500%. However, a recent February 2021 survey from market research company, Packaged Facts, said that “40% of pet product shoppers claimed they shopped online more for pet products due to the impact of COVID-19”. But, the company also pointed out that this uptick in e-commerce shopping in the United States pet industry won't be reversed even as restrictions are increasingly lifted and the SARS-CoV-2 vaccines become more widely available, because consumers have become acclimated to the ease and convenience of online ordering [2].

Regarding companion pets, recent publications and the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) states “Based on the limited information available to date, the risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low.” While this statement does not completely rule out possible transmission in the future from viral mutations, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) more clearly states “There is little to no evidence that domestic animals are easily infected with SARS-CoV-2 under natural conditions and no evidence to date that they transmit the virus to people” [2-7].

The CDC further comments that: “The CDC recognizes that companion pets are vital for human physical and mental health particularly in this necessary time of social distancing and use of personal protective equipment” and “There is no evidence that the virus can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of pets. Do not wipe or bathe your pet with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydro-

gen peroxide, or other products, such as hand sanitizer, counter-cleaning wipes, or other industrial or surface cleaners. Talk to your veterinarian if you have questions about appropriate products for bathing or cleaning your pet” [5].

As added precautions: pet owners limit their pet's interaction with people outside their household:

- Keep cats indoors when possible and do not let them roam freely outside.
- Walk dogs on a leash at least 6 feet (2 meters) away from others.
- Avoid public places where a large number of people gather.
- Please wear a mask and keep to social distancing of six feet, but do not put a mask on pets as they can be harmful.

People have asked: Can I take my dog or cat to daycare or a groomer? Do not put masks on pets, and do not take a sick pet to a groomer or boarding facility. Signs of sickness in dogs may include fever, coughing, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, lethargy, sneezing, discharge from the nose or eyes, vomiting, or diarrhea. If you think your pet is sick, call your veterinarian. However, please remember that numerous infectious diseases exist such as the kennel cough complex and canine influenza that can cause similar symptoms. Thus, by taking precautions we are protecting other companion pets from any respiratory viruses that can be transmitted within a particular species. Also, the CDC estimates that 40% of humans have asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 infections, but can still be infectious to others. So, you or someone in your household could be infected and asymptomatic, and still could pass it on to others including a pet groomer or boarding facility [7-9].

Should we be vaccinating pets with canine coronavirus vaccines to help protect against human SARS-CoV-2? According to the World

Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA), “The canine coronavirus vaccines available in some global markets are intended to protect against enteric coronavirus infection and are *not* licensed for protection against respiratory infections. Veterinarians should *not* use such vaccines in the face of the current SARS-CoV-2 outbreak thinking that there may be some form of cross-protection against COVID-19. There is absolutely no evidence that vaccinating dogs with commercially available vaccines will provide cross-protection against the infection by COVID-19, since the enteric and respiratory viruses are distinctly different variants of coronavirus. No vaccines are currently available in any market for respiratory coronavirus infection in the dog [7].

Regarding laboratory testing, advertisements have recently appeared in the United States for SARS-Cov-2 tests for pets, but these are likely to be unreliable or not validated. Thus, if your pet’s veterinarian tests your pet for SARS-CoV-2, any positive result will need to be confirmed by the United States Department of Agriculture’s National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL). This is simply because researchers and scientists need to track how this virus may be spread [8,9].

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