Q: What causes COVID-19?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is SARS-CoV-2. It spreads by droplets when sick people cough.

Q: What can you tell me about the SARS-CoV-2 virus and pets?

The SARS-CoV-2 virus spreads from human to human. We know now that people infected with SARS-CoV-19 should limit contact with their pets. Do not let them lick you. Make sure you wash your hands after you touch your pet, especially if you have COVID-19.

Q: I heard that pets get infected by coronaviruses, is that true?

Yes, that is true. Coronaviruses can be found in many animals, but the vast majority do not infect people. There are two types of coronavirus that infect dogs. The first virus affects the stomach and intestines, and the second affects the respiratory system. Cats can be infected with feline coronavirus which can cause feline infectious peritonitis. There is no evidence that these dog and cat viruses can infect people.

It is important to know that these are not the same as the novel SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.

Q: I have read that pets can get infected by SARS-CoV-2, is that true?

That is true. There have been reports from around the world suggesting that some animals are susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 infection. There are a very small number of reports, compared to the number of cases in humans, and we still need to do more research. Many of the animals that had the virus were not sick.

We know that the majority of the cases identified in pets have been associated with humans that have COVID-19. We also know that some animals may be more susceptible to infection than others. The identification of animals that are infected, or have been exposed to the virus, should not be over interpreted. More research is still needed.
Penn Vet COVID-19 Q&A

Q: I’ve been diagnosed with COVID-19, what should I do with my pet?

People infected with SARS-CoV-2 must limit contact with their pets. It is recommended that people who are confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 avoid close contact with their pets as you would another human family member. If that is not possible, wear a mask and maintain good hygiene practices. Animals that belong to humans with COVID-19 should stay indoors as much as possible until the owner recovers.

Q: Is there a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine for dogs and cats?

There are several vaccines for animals in development, and some have been given to zoo animals that are at higher risk of severe infection. However, because it is so rare that companion animals become sick with this virus, a vaccine is not expected to be approved or used in companion animals.

Q: Does my pet have COVID-19?

If you do not have COVID-19, then your pet most likely doesn’t have it either. We still have no research to the contrary. The CDC have said there is no reason to think that pets are a source of infection for humans. If you think your pet has an infectious disease, you should contact a veterinarian.

Q: Can my pet be tested for coronavirus?

General testing of animals is not available. If you have, or recently had, COVID-19, tell your vet and they will decide if your pet should be tested for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Penn Vet is conducting a study that screens animals from the Philadelphia region to make sure that pets are not infected in high numbers: www.vet.upenn.edu/covid-screening-in-pets. Please note that this test is for research purposes only and is not meant for the diagnosis of sick animals. If your pet is sick, contact your veterinarian.

For more information about COVID-19 and resources, please visit: https://www.vet.upenn.edu/pets-and-covid