

## COVID-19 Response: Animal-related Exposure Risks

### ***This WorkCare Fact Sheet discusses animal-related COVID-19 exposure risks.***

Although the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 appears to have originated with an animal source in an outdoor Chinese market, the risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

There is also no evidence to suggest that imported animals or animal products pose a risk for spreading COVID-19 in the U.S.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some coronaviruses cause illnesses in people, while others cause illness in certain animals such as cattle, camels and bats. Canine and feline coronaviruses infect animals but not humans.

A small number of pet animals have been reported to be infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19, usually after contact with a contagious person. Although certain bacteria and fungi can be carried on fur and hair, there is no evidence to suggest that viruses can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of pets.

### Animals Testing Positive

Public health officials say more studies are needed to understand if and how different kinds of animals are affected by COVID-19.

In the U.S., a New York City zoo tiger was the first animal to be confirmed positive for SARS-CoV-2 by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) on April 4, 2020. Samples from the tiger were collected and tested after several lions and tigers showed signs of respiratory illness. Public health officials believe the large cats became sick after being exposed to an infected zoo employee. The CDC reports it is working with experts to monitor and report on these cases.

On April 22, 2020, the [\*USDA and CDC announced the first confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection in two pet cats\*](#) in different parts of New York state. Both had mild respiratory illness and were expected to make a full recovery. No evidence of SARS-CoV-2 has been found in wild bats in the U.S.

For any animal that is presumed to be positive, the USDA's National Veterinary Service Laboratory performs additional testing to confirm the infection. Test results are posted on its [\*website\*](#).

A suspected case of animal-to-human transmission at a mink farm in Holland is under investigation. Recent outbreaks of COVID-19 among minks are suspected to have come from human handlers. Dutch authorities said the risk of animal-to-human transmission is minimal.

If a wild animal in the U.S. were to become infected with the virus, it is not yet known whether the infection could then spread among wildlife, or to domestic animals or people. Further studies are needed. Viewing wildlife from a distance is the safest option.

### Recommendations

Since animals can spread some diseases to people, it's always a good idea to practice [\*healthy habits\*](#) around pets and other animals. For example, thoroughly washing hands after handling a pet or touching its toys or food dish is recommended.

Equestrian facilities are advised to follow state and/or local public health guidance to protect horses, patrons and employees from potential exposure to infected people.

People with COVID-19 symptoms are advised to isolate themselves from other people and their pets. They should cover their nose and mouth when caring for a pet and wash their hands after any interaction. If a pet is sick, it is advisable to contact a veterinarian, but do not take an animal directly to a clinic to reduce human-to-human exposure risk. A telemedicine consultation may be an option.

### Resources

[\*COVID-19 and Animals FAQs\*](#)

[\*COVID-19 and Pets\*](#)

[\*Information on Bringing an Animal into the United States\*](#)

[\*World Organization for Animal Health: Q&As on COVID-19\*](#)