

13 March, 2020

Update on report of transmission from human to pet dog in Hong Kong

Further to our communication on 6 March, we have an update on the Pomeranian dog in Hong Kong (1).

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) in Hong Kong said yesterday [Thursday 12 Mar 2020] that:

“the blood test result of the dog which had repeatedly tested weakly positive for COVID-19 virus is negative.

The AFCD collected samples from the dog 5 times for tests since late February [2020] and detected low levels of the COVID-19 virus from its nasal and oral cavity samples. A blood sample was also taken from the dog on 3 March 2020 for serological testing and the result is negative. The negative result indicates that there is not a strong immune response and that there are not measurable amounts of antibodies in the blood at this stage.

The negative serological test result does not suggest that the dog has not been infected with the virus. It is known in some asymptomatic or mild cases of human infections with other types of coronavirus that antibodies may not always develop. It is also not uncommon in the earlier stages of infections to have a negative result as it often takes 14 days or more for measurable levels of antibodies to be detected. Another blood sample will be taken later for further testing”.

At this stage there is still no evidence that dogs can play a role in the spread of this human disease, or that they become sick.

The AVA will continue to monitor the situation and provide you with regular updates. We have established a working group to review the evolving information on SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 and to provide you with appropriate resources.

While pet owners should always use good hygiene practices, including hand hygiene before and after handling animals as well as their food, we do not believe there is reason for pet owners to be otherwise concerned.

As this is an evolving situation, pet owners who may become infected with SARS-COV-2 should take precautionary steps, minimising close contact with their pets and practicing appropriate hand hygiene practices (1) before and after handling their pets. At no stage should pet owners be taking measures that may compromise the welfare of their pets.

The primary source of SARS-COV-2 transmission remains human-to-human contact, and the best way to reduce your risk is to practice effective hand hygiene (1). Resources to use in your clinic are available the Hand Hygiene Australia website <https://www.hha.org.au/local-implementation/promotional-materials>. Hand hygiene should be championed by all clinical staff.

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Some key messages for your staff and clients:

- First reported case of human-to-animal transmission
- Dog is in quarantine and is not showing any clinical signs of disease
- There is currently no evidence that pets play a role in human infection – the major risk remains human to human contact
- Hand hygiene is critical before and after handling your pets, as well as their food.
- Pet owners who may be infected with the virus or who are voluntarily isolating because of risk of infection, are advised to keep their pets with them, but minimise handling as a precautionary measure until more information is known about the virus and routes of transmission

References:

1. <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202003/12/P2020031200670.htm>
2. <https://www.who.int/gpsc/tools/GPSC-HandRub-Wash.pdf>

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