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COVID-19 & Pets - What You Need to Know

In times of uncertainty, our pets can be a source of great comfort. The benefits of pet ownership, and direct interaction, have been well documented. For example, pets can reduce blood pressure and the risk of heart attack or stroke. They can also reduce feelings of anxiety, depression, grief and isolation (CRC, 2020); problems that are becoming endemic as our fear of the disease increases and we are required to spend time isolated from others.

Unfortunately, our anxiety can be further stoked if we begin to worry about our pets themselves. Are they at risk? Do they pose a risk to others? Here are the answers to some of the most common questions we have received.

Note: These answers are based on the best information available as of the time of this posting. New information is being continually released. Please check with the CDC or your state health agency for regular updates.

1) Can I catch COVID-19 from my cat or dog?

No. Other coronaviruses have passed from animals to humans in the past, but this is extremely rare; there is no evidence that this is the case in the current outbreak. There are a few disease agents that dogs and cats can carry and give to humans, some parasites for example, but pets are not carriers of this coronavirus (CDC, 2020). There are other canine and feline coronaviruses, but these do not infect people.

2) Can my cat or dog contract COVID-19 from an infected person?

This virus cannot pass from people to animals, either. There are no known cases of pets contracting COVID-19 from any source. We cannot infect animals any more than they can infect us with this virus.

3) Do horses, livestock, or zoo animals infect people with this coronavirus?

These animals do not appear to carry the virus or pass it on to humans. It's the zoo keeper you need to avoid, not the zoo animals.

4) Can pets serve as a vector, passing the disease between family members indirectly? What if I sneeze on my dog?

If you sneeze or cough on your family dog, and another person pets the dog, it is highly unlikely that they will contract the virus. COVID-19 is primarily contracted via saliva or mucus droplets, such as those released in a cough or sneeze. This is why it is so important to cover your mouth with a tissue or sleeve when coughing/sneezing, and why thorough hand washing is so essential.

It is possible to pick up the virus by touching a contaminated surface or object, but this is not the primary means of infection. Smooth, non-porous surfaces, such as countertops,

transmit the virus much more efficiently than porous materials, like fur. Animals don't spread the virus this way because animal hair is both fibrous and porous. The hairs absorb and trap the virus particles, a bit like a Swiffer (AVMA, 2020). Thus, petting your dog is unlikely to expose you to risk.

5) What are the recommendations regarding contact with pets?

The same recommendations that we already have in place - wash your hands, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, practice social distancing. You might need to take your dog outside, but don't let your pets bring you into close contact with other dog owners.

For many of us, our animals are a primary source of affection and comfort. It is reassuring to know that our pets won't be transmitting the virus. However, at this time much is still unknown about the virus and the disease it produces. Exercise caution and practice good hygiene. Wash your hands thoroughly after contact with your pet, their food, waste, or supplies. While you are sick, do not hug the animal or allow her to "kiss" you, lick you, or share your food until more has been discovered about this coronavirus and COVID-19.

Isolation can be difficult; however, there may be no better time to teach your pet new tricks or behaviors - in fact the AKC is now offering trick dog titles online, via video certification. The faculty and staff of the Animal Behavior Institute are working remotely and will continue to offer our classes and programs during the shutdown. This is a challenging time for all of us, but together with our pets we'll get through it - and come out stronger on the other side.

Sources:

1. **CRC Health** (<https://www.crchealth.com/types-of-therapy/what-is-animal-assisted-therapy>)
2. **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/CDC** (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/animals.html>)
3. **American Veterinary Medical Association/AVMA** (https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/covid-19-faq-pet-owners_031520.pdf)