

## **SARS-CoV-2 and Animals: FAQs**

**New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets, & Food (DAMF)**

**New Hampshire Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS)**

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*\*This is a constantly-evolving situation and information may have changed since the time this document was created.*

***Note from CDC: The scientific name of the new strain of coronavirus is SARS-CoV-2. In people, the disease caused by the virus is called Coronavirus Disease 2019, or COVID-19. Because we are addressing the virus itself in the context of animal health, we refer to it as SARS-CoV-2.***

### **THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACT TO KEEP IN MIND...**

Human infection is being driven by person-to-person transmission. At this time, there is no evidence that domestic animals, including pets, can spread SARS-CoV-2 to humans or that they might be a source of infection in the United States.

### **THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE DISCOURAGES ANIMAL TESTING FOR SARS-CoV-2 EXCEPT IN VERY RARE CIRCUMSTANCES.**

Testing animals for SARS-CoV-2 is **not** generally recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials (NASAHO), or American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD). Testing should be considered only under very limited circumstances, for the following reasons:

- The COVID-19 pandemic is being spread by person-to-person transmission. While there is limited evidence that domestic animals can be infected, there is currently no evidence that domestic animals can spread SARS-CoV-2 to humans. A positive test in a domestic animal therefore has limited public health significance.
- Widespread testing of domestic animals for SARS-CoV-2 would compete with human needs for testing materials like swabs, transport media, and tubes, as well as the personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to collect samples. PPE and testing supplies should be conserved whenever possible for human health care providers to respond to the pandemic.
- Appropriate animal testing of a single animal requires multiple sets of samples from three different sites on a single animal. SARS-CoV-2 is notifiable to OIE. All presumptive positive results must be confirmed by the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL). Routine testing without a defined purpose can hamper the national and international response and may risk harm (such as abandonment) to the welfare of pets.
- Since there is no specific treatment for SARS-CoV-2 in animals, the test result would not change the basic recommendation that any animal in a quarantined household should remain at home, away from other animals and the public, until the human quarantine is complete.

- Per their own public materials, private labs in the United States (US) have already run thousands of samples on household pets from COVID-affected areas around the world and in the US. These samples are in addition to those that have been run at national and university labs across the globe. In total, there have only been a handful of reported positives, to date.
- Retesting animals that were previously positive is also discouraged. These animals may remain PCR positive long after live virus is no longer present. In humans, PCR tests are known to remain positive well after persons have been released from isolation due to nonviable virus or viral remnants. See below for advice about how to manage animals in positive households.

### **I MAY HAVE A PATIENT I WOULD CONSIDER TESTING FOR SARS-COV-2.**

SARS-CoV-2 testing should be considered on a very limited, case-by-case basis for animals that reside in New Hampshire. Regardless of the location of the laboratory, any test for a domestic animal residing in New Hampshire shall follow this process. Test requests must be submitted by a licensed, accredited veterinarian who is responsible for the animal's care. Veterinarians must rule out other, more common causes of illness in animals before requesting consideration for SARS-CoV-2 testing. Veterinarians wishing to discuss SARS-CoV-2 testing for a particular patient should contact DAMF at [stephen.k.crawford@agr.nh.gov](mailto:stephen.k.crawford@agr.nh.gov).

### **WHO WILL DECIDE WHETHER TO TEST?**

Private labs might accept tests from practitioners without the engagement and approval of state officials. Animal testing for SARS-CoV-2 will only be approved by state officials if both DAMF and DHHS agree that is necessary to protect the health of vulnerable human or animal populations.

### **WHERE SHOULD TESTING BE COMPLETED?**

- DAMF has confirmed that the Animal Health Diagnostic Center (AHDC) at Cornell University is willing to conduct testing in accordance with any additional restrictions required by the State of New York, including the approval of the New York state veterinarian. Submission guidelines and lab contact information for SARS-CoV-2 testing at the AHDC are available on their website, <https://www.vet.cornell.edu/animal-health-diagnostic-center/about/SARS-CoV-2Testing>.
- Per federal guidance, any positive samples “must be” confirmed through additional testing by USDA’s National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/animal-testing.html>.

### **WHO WILL PAY FOR SARS-CoV-2 TESTING?**

The animal's owner will incur the financial costs associated with specimen collection, shipping, and testing.

### **WHAT HAPPENS IF A TEST IS RUN AT A PRIVATE LAB WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL OF STATE AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS?**

- The owner will incur the costs for specimen collection, shipping, and testing for an unauthorized test run outside of the CDC/USDA guidance.
- If a private lab does find a positive sample on a test that was run without the prior approval of state and federal officials, the owner will likely incur additional specimen collection, shipping, and testing costs to verify a result from an unauthorized test.
- NVSL requires the sample to have been collected by an accredited veterinarian, state-appointed veterinarian, or Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostician (FADD). In cases where a practitioner did not get approval ahead-of-time and they are not accredited both owner and pet bear the burden of another sample collection in addition to the new specimen collection, shipping, and testing costs for the owner.
- Collecting a subsequent sample puts the sample collector in a position of unnecessary risk.
- Duplicate samples are wasteful while supplies are short.

### **WHO WILL COLLECT THE ANIMAL SAMPLES?**

Official sampling of animals approved for testing should be performed by an USDA accredited veterinarian; [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal\\_health/one\\_health/downloads/faq-sapho-on-companion-animal-testing.pdf](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/faq-sapho-on-companion-animal-testing.pdf).

### **WHAT SPECIMEN TYPES WILL BE COLLECTED?**

Oral, nasal and rectal/fecal swabs should be collected per OIE (World Organization for Animal Health) recommendations and according to established sample collection protocols available at the AHDC website. Please submit oral, nasal and rectal swabs in separate vials.

### **WHAT IS THE REPORTING PROCESS?**

Laboratories and veterinarians both should report presumptive positive results to DAMF. Samples tested at Cornell will be shipped directly to NVSL. In turn, NVSL will report the results to DAMF who will discuss them with the submitting veterinarian.

### **MY CLIENT HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED AS A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19. WHAT SHOULD I TELL THEM ABOUT TESTING THEIR PET?**

Although there have been only two reports of pets becoming sick with SARS-CoV-2 in the United States, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus.

- When possible, another member of the household should care for the pet.
- If possible, the infected person should avoid contact with the pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food.
- If an infected person must care for the pet while they are sick, they should wash their hands before and after interacting with them.
- In most cases, the recommendations for management and treatment of a pet will not change based upon the test result.

- The handful of known animal cases have had mild courses of illness.

#### **HOW TO MANAGE ANIMALS IN COVID-19 POSITIVE HOUSEHOLDS?**

- Any animal in a quarantined household should remain at home, away from other animals and the public, until the human quarantine is complete.
- DAMF will consider AVMA guidance concerning the management of animals in shelters receiving animals from a household where a human has tested positive for COVID-19., <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/interim-recommendations-intake-companion-animals-households-humans-COVID-19-are-present>.
- DAMF will consider CDC's guidance concerning the management of animals in households in which a human has tested positive for COVID-19, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/interim-guidance-managing-people-in-home-care-and-isolation-who-have-pets.html>.
- There is no current federal guidance available regarding quarantine of test positive dogs, cats or other pets. DAMF will follow any guidance provided by the USDA/CDC working group if new information becomes available.
- Until such guidance may be developed, if an animal has a positive result, DAMF will not remove the animal from the home.
- AVMA guidance suggests dogs in COVID-19 positive households dogs should be walked outside for elimination and exercise but direct contact with other companion animals should be avoided as a best practice to protect animal health.
  - Feces should be collected using gloved hands or a bag and disposed of immediately.
  - Ideally, these dogs should be walked in an area that can be readily sanitized in a dedicated area separate from the general animal population.

