Boots on the ground: Caring for COVID-19 exposed pets in shelters

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Questions

• What should I know if I’m caring for COVID-19 exposed pets in a shelter?
• What if I touch them?
• Can it be carried on fur?
• Why 14 days?
• What if a pet from COVID-19 positive home bites me?
• What if a pet from COVID-19 exposed home licks me?
• Is it carried in their poop?
• Has any person gotten COVID-19 from a cat or dog?
Goals during the pandemic

- Keep humans safe
- Support social distancing and #safeathome for humans.
- Responsibly assess what is essential.
- Limit the use of medical and surgical supplies.
- Limit use of PPE needed in the human health care field.
- Maintain operations that are essential to care for animals and support pet owners.

Key concepts

- Now is the time to have a only small population of animals in shelters.
- Pets are integral members of a family and should stay at home with their owners.
- The greatest risk to humans is from human to human transmission.
- Pets are NOT playing an epidemiologic role in this outbreak.
- A small number of pets have been infected but no evidence yet that pets can transmit the virus back to humans.
- Pets should socially distance along with their owners.
- Owners who are sick should isolate from their pets as they would from any other member of their family.
Abundance of caution

- Means when we don’t have all the answers we choose the safest path
- Means we think we might be over-reacting
- Best action to take when some things are still unknown
- Because we’d rather back off later than say we should have done more.

Action items:

- Limit intake to emergencies!
  - Sick, injured, dangerous, endangered
- Leave in place
  - Healthy cats and kittens
  - Unweaned and kittens in good health
- Provide a balance of outcomes for the intake that comes.
- Only essential spay neuter.
- Follow recommendations for handling exposed animals.
- Staff in split teams to better ensure care.
Community action items and messaging

• People should prepare a plan for who will care for their pet in the event they are hospitalized or cannot provide care.

• Shelters and communities should work to support the human animal bond, keeping animals with their families whenever possible.

• Communities should plan together for handling exposed animals who will present to shelters.

Testing considerations

• Still many unknowns about animals, exposure, infection, and transmission.

• Knowledge helps to dispel fear.

• Testing is not generally recommended.

• Only a VERY small number of animals have tested positive.
Key Points from recommendations made collaboratively by the CDC, AVMA, and Shelter Medicine Programs

• Stay safe if collecting animals from sick people’s homes
• Utilize gloves and re-usable PPE (gowns, coveralls, footwear, masks)
• Bathing is not necessary
  • No evidence to support animals can be fomites
• House exposed animals separately from general population
• Allow dogs to be walked outside for exercise and elimination
• Limit close contact with humans
• Avoid direct contact with other animals
• Sanitation as usually recommended, spot cleaning preferred
• Once in shelter, hold for 14 days prior to adoption or foster

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Other questions?
Thank you for all you’re doing!
Please stay safe.