



Frequently Asked Questions in relation to COVID -19 and animals

1. What causes Corona or COVID-19?

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a family of RNA (ribonucleic acid) viruses. They are called corona viruses because the virus particle exhibits a characteristic 'corona' (crown) of spike proteins around its lipid envelope. CoV infections are common in animals and humans. Some strains of CoV are zoonotic, meaning they can be transmitted between animals and humans, but many strains are not zoonotic and thus are not transmitted between animals and humans.

2. Are there any precautions to take with live animals or animal products?

Although there is uncertainty about the origin of the COVID-19 virus, in accordance with advice offered by the WHO, as a general precaution, when visiting live animals, markets, farms, zoo's, animal sanctuaries or any place where animal products or animal by products are present, general hygiene measures should be applied.

Standard recommendations issued by health authorities to prevent infection spread should also be followed. These include:

- Regular hand washing or use of sanitizers, including before and after being around or handling animals;
- Covering mouth and nose with the elbow when coughing and sneezing;
- Avoid close contact with animals if you are showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing;
- Avoid unnecessary direct contact with animals (eg licking, kissing etc..)
- As per general good food safety practices, raw meat, milk or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid potential cross-contamination with uncooked foods. Meat from healthy livestock that is cooked thoroughly remains safe to eat.

3. Should contact with farm animals or pets be avoided?

So far there is no indication that farm animals or other animals such as pets, play a role in coronavirus transmission. When working in contact with farm animals it is very important to respect the usual hygiene rules. Farmers or animal keepers who are self-quarantined for coronavirus should delegate the care of their livestock to another person or, if this is

not possible, limit contact with animals to the bare minimum. The care of the animals must be guaranteed.

4. Is the virus transmissible from animals to humans or vice versa?

A distinction must be made between transmission and propagation. Transmission risk is considered very low. Animals, production or pets, do not play a role in the development of the current epidemic. However, there is currently no comprehensive information available. It cannot be excluded that a pet of a coronavirus patient may be infected or may be infective. So far animals have not shown any symptoms of the disease, i.e. they do not get sick. The current propagation is essentially human to human and there is no evidence that animals play a role in coronavirus propagation.

5. If an animal (farm animal or pet) can have the virus that causes COVID-19 on its body, can that animal then spread the virus to another person?

There are many diseases that can be spread from animals to people. At this time there is no evidence to believe COVID-19 can be spread by animals. It is good practice to recommend that people always wash their hands after touching or having any contact with animals as a general precaution. Also unnecessary direct contact with animals (eg licking, kissing etc..) should be avoided.

Farm animals

6. Are agricultural products, such as animal feed, a source of contamination for the farm?

So far, there is no scientific knowledge of virus transmission through these sources.

7. What measures should be taken in the case of visitors accessing the farm e.g. regulatory officers, part timeworkers, visitors?

Veterinary, zootechnical and any other intervention that is necessary for the health, welfare and day to day operation of the farm should take place as normal while taking the necessary precautions such as frequent hand washing.

Everyone visiting the farm must be able to comply with hygiene rules, such as washing hands regularly or use hand sanitizers as well as with the normal biosecurity procedures for the particular farm. The farm must be equipped accordingly to allow the frequent

washing of hands etc. Non-essential visitors to the farm should be avoided.

8. If a farmer and his family are self-quarantined, can they continue to work in the farm?

Self-quarantined individuals should, in principle, stay at home and possibly avoid contact with other people and animals. The care of livestock should be delegated to another person or, if this is not possible, contact with animals should be limited to the bare minimum. Necessary arrangements should be made to ensure that the care and welfare of the latter is guaranteed.

9. How can livestock be protected?

The usual hygiene and biosecurity standards for farms must be respected. People testing positive for COVID-19 or those with symptoms compatible with COVID-19 should stay at home and possibly avoid contact with other people and animals.

10. Do farm animals need to be quarantined?

There are currently no quarantine measures required or foreseen for animals.

Products of animal origin

11. Are meat and dairy products that come from affected countries safe to eat?

According to the WHO, there is no risk of contracting COVID-19 from animal products. Safe food handling practices, such as washing hands and cooking food well, should always be practiced as a general precaution.

Companion animals

12. What should one do if one needs to take his/her pet to a veterinary clinic?

If one needs to take his/her pet to a veterinarian it is advisable that the clinic is contacted beforehand for an appointment and then to follow further guidelines.

13. Is there a vaccine available against the COVID-19 virus that I can administer to my pet?

Currently no vaccines against the COVID-19 virus is available for humans or animals. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that a vaccine for humans would be available in around 12-18 months.

14. What can one do to ensure his pet/s are cared for if someone in his household is in quarantine?

One needs to plan for the needs of the pets and ensure to have adequate supply of food and medicaments for the pets.

15. What happens if I will be hospitalised because of COVID-19 virus and I have no one to take care of my pet ?

You can contact the Department on **1717** to assist you in finding an appropriate accommodation for your pet.

16. I am a cat feeder responsible of cats in my locality? Should I keep feeding the cats?

Arrangements are to be made to ensure that animals are continued to be cared for. Contact with the cats are to be kept to a minimum. Feeders are to follow the recommendations issued by health authorities to prevent infection spread and ensure to keep abreast with any updates.

17. Should one avoid visiting animal sanctuaries?

Although according to the World Health Organization (WHO) to date there is no evidence that a dog or cat can transmit the COVID-19 virus it is still recommended that unnecessary visits to animal sanctuaries are to be avoided. Everyone visiting the sanctuaries must be able to comply with hygiene measures, such as washing hands regularly or use hand sanitizers. The premises must be equipped accordingly to allow the frequent washing of hands etc. Non-essential visitors to sanctuaries should be avoided.

18.Can volunteers visit the respective sanctuaries/ shelters?

Visits to animal sanctuaries should be kept to a minimum. Nevertheless, responsible persons are to ensure that animals are continued to be cared for, fed, watered and treated, as appropriate. Standard recommendations issued by health authorities to prevent infection spread should also be followed.

Visiting of animals in other establishments

19.Could I visit other animals for leisure?

Visiting animals, apart from pet animals, for leisure, such as those animals kept in zoos, breeding establishments, boarding establishments and kennels should be avoided.

20. Could I visit other animals that I am responsible for?

It is necessary that animals which are kept under your responsibility are fed and cared for regularly and these animals are given the usual care that they need in order to satisfy their minimum health and welfare requirements. These include animals kept in pet shops, in zoos, in private collections, kept for animal experimentation; etc.

References

- Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) OIE World Organisation for Animal Health- <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>
- Ufficio federale dell'agricoltura UFAG Switzerland- <https://www.blw.admin.ch/blw/it/home/nachhaltige-produktion/produktionssicherheit/neuescoronavirus.html>