

Pets and Covid-19

Press release from the National Academy of Medicine

March 24, 2020

In the context of the pandemic due to Sars-Cov-2, the virus responsible for Covid-19 disease, questions are being asked: is there a risk in being around a domestic animal? Is my pet at risk of being infected?

The National Academy of Medicine, which brings together doctors and veterinarians, has analysed these questions with a view to making some recommendations¹.

Because they are species-specific, the vast majority of coronaviruses present in pets (as in farm animals) are without any danger for humans. Only certain coronaviruses (Betacoronaviruses), whose natural reservoir is the bat, have the ability to cross the species barrier and trigger a disease (zoonosis) in humans, sometimes leading to an epidemic (Sras in 2003; Mers in 2012; and Covid-19 in 2020).

To date, there is no scientific demonstration on the risk of human contamination by the virus from domestic animals, nor on the risk of contamination with replication and high viral excretion of a domestic animal from a patient with Covid-19.

However, these risks cannot be ruled out for the following reasons:

- The virus responsible for Covid-19 is close to the SARS-CoV that was responsible for the 2003 Sras epidemic. SARS-CoV could be isolated from several animal species including raccoon dogs, cats or experimentally infecting ferrets and rodents (guinea pigs and hamsters), most often without clinical signs.
- The possibility that pets may carry the virus has been raised since the discovery in Hong Kong of two positive dogs when their owners had Covid-19. Follow-up of the first dog quarantined for 14 days from 26 February, and then tested six times, revealed very low levels of virus in the respiratory tract and oral cavity, followed by negative results and the absence of serum antibodies indicating a transient infection. The presence of the virus in faeces has not been demonstrated, although faeces are often rich in coronavirus in reservoir animals. The second dog tested positive on March 18 is under quarantine and surveillance. Both dogs never showed clinical signs.

These scientific data suggest that Covid-19 can be transmitted to the dogs from the infected owner. However, there is currently no evidence that dogs can in turn

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contaminate, through aerosols or saliva, uninfected people or other animals encountered (e.g. in the street).

Recommendations of the National Academy of Medicine

Although the risk of animal-human contamination by the virus is considered by the Organisation for Animal Health (OIE, opinion of 9 March 2020) and the French National Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health Safety (Anses, opinion of 11 March 2020) to be unlikely, it is recommended to :

- Reinforce the usual biosecurity measures with regard to the numerous pathogens that can be transmitted (aerosols, saliva, droppings) by pets (dogs, cats, ferrets, rodents in particular) and often ignored by the owner. It is important to wash your hands frequently when caring for your pet (litter, walking, feeding, etc.), especially if it has been stroked, and you should not let it lick your face;
- Separate the owner infected with Covid-19 from the pet during the period when the sick person may be excreting the virus. Whenever possible, quarantine should be instituted to limit close contact of the animal with other family members (e.g. animal in the bedroom).

These recommendations should not make you forget that :

- in a household where a sick person has Covid-19, the risk to people living in the same household is much more related to contact with the sick person than with the pet;
- especially in times of confinement, the pet is far more a friend than a danger.