



COVID-19: Veterinary Facilities and Animal Sampling

The Mississippi Board of Animal Health Team is working with our local, state and national partners to stay abreast of new developments. With the recent announcement of COVID-19 infecting the tigers in the New York Zoo, a lot of attention is being placed on animals during this COVID 19 outbreak. We have attempted to provide the most current guidance for you as a veterinary practitioner, in order to deal with issues you may face with your clients and patients.

Veterinary Facilities

What do we know about COVID-19 and domestic animals?

- To date, while animals have tested positive for COVID-19, there is no evidence that domestic animals are becoming ill with the virus that causes COVID-19, or spreading it to people. However, we are still learning about this virus.
- Transmission of COVID-19 is much more likely to occur from infected people, rather than animals. Soft surfaces, such as fur or hair, don't transfer viruses as well as hard surfaces.

How can veterinary facilities maintain social distancing with clients?

- Consider the workflow at your facility to create methods to maintain social distancing. Possible ideas include:
 - Curbside medicine: the building is closed to clients who remain in their cars while pets are taken in and out by staff, and discussions about care are conducted over the phone
 - Consider telemedicine appointments for established clients with valid veterinarian-client-patient-relationships, when medically appropriate
 - Using temporary measures to mark out 6 foot distances to follow CDC guidelines on How to Protect Yourself in the lobby or exam rooms (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>)

How should veterinary facilities handle animals during the COVID-19 outbreak?

- If an animal is healthy or is presenting for non-respiratory illness, staff should wear gloves when handling patients, reduce patient contact to only what is necessary, and practice excellent hand hygiene before and after handling patients.

- If an animal has signs of a respiratory infection, from a household with a COVID-19 infected person, staff should follow the above guidelines, **plus** wear eye protection (goggles or face shield), a facemask, and a gown or labcoat. Clean and disinfect the exam room thoroughly. After typical respiratory pathogens have been ruled out, testing for the virus that causes COVID-19 could be considered. See guidelines below regarding testing requests.

How should rooms or treatment areas be cleaned and disinfected?

- Standard cleaning and disinfection protocols will kill the virus that causes COVID-19. Be sure to follow the correct contact time and dilution instructions for the products you use. Focus additional disinfection on high contact and high touch surfaces such as phones, doorknobs, keyboards, and equipment.

What if a client has COVID-19 and their animal requires veterinary care?

- If client informs you they have tested positive for COVID-19, recommend that a healthy person bring in the animal for them. If that is not possible, have the client stay in their car, and send a staff member with appropriate personal protective equipment (eye and respiratory protection, gloves, and gown or labcoat) to bring the pet into the clinic.

Do I need to notify the State Veterinarian if I see a pet from a household where someone is ill with COVID-19?

No, you do not need to let our office know about each of these instances. However, we are available if you have questions.

What if one of my employees becomes ill with COVID-19?

- Veterinary personnel should not work while ill, whether it is COVID-19 or another illness.
- If a staff member should test positive for COVID-19 they should isolate at home and not return to work for 14 days.
- Other staff in the clinic should be alerted that a staff member has tested positive for COVID-19.
- MSDH is performing intensive case and contact investigation around each case and will issue isolation and quarantine orders as indicated.
- Determine all the days the staff member worked up to 48 hours prior to symptom onset and after. Identify any other staff that had close contact with the positive staff member.
- **High risk contacts to a case include persons who have had more than 10 minutes of contact without PPE (including eye protection) within 6 feet of a confirmed case. These staff members should quarantine at home and not work for 14 days.**
- When potential resource constraints exist, consideration may be given to allowing veterinarians and their staff who are asymptomatic high risk contacts to continue to work if they wear a surgical mask during work and monitor their temperature and symptoms twice daily.

Testing companion animals and livestock for COVID-19

Should any animal showing signs of respiratory illness be tested?

The State of Mississippi, USDA and CDC do not recommend routine testing of animals for this virus. Because the situation is ever-evolving, public and animal health officials may decide to test certain animals out of an abundance of caution.

What should I do if I think my animal has the virus?

Call your veterinary clinic with any questions about your animal's health. Also call ahead before you visit the clinic in order to ensure the veterinary clinic is prepared for your visit. Make sure to tell your veterinarian if your animal was exposed to a person diagnosed and sick with COVID-19, and if your animal is showing any signs of illness. Veterinarians who believe an animal should be tested will contact state animal health officials.

How will the decision to test be made?

Public and animal health officials may decide to test certain animals that are showing signs of illness and that are known to have been exposed to the virus on a case by case basis. Routine testing of companion animals is not recommended at this time. The decision to test an animal will be authorized by the Mississippi State Veterinarian in cooperation with the Mississippi State Department of Health .

Authorization for testing will be conducted within the two following areas:

When requested by a private veterinarian who is reporting:

- A new, concerning illness that cannot be otherwise explained, and;
- The companion animal has had close contact with a person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection, and;
- Common companion animal illnesses have been ruled out by testing for infectious diseases.

When requested by academic institutions for the purpose of research:

- The proposal, sampling criteria, animal species, and scope of the project will be outlined prior to authorization.
- Researchers will establish an endpoint for each study in conjunction with the Board of Animal Health based upon time and date, or number of animals/households tested.
- If the scope of the project, the testing criteria, or the endpoint changes, the State Veterinarian must authorize those changes.

Who will collect the samples from animals?

An MBAH or a USDA veterinarian will collect samples using appropriate personal protective equipment and sample collection methods.

What will happen to an animal that tests positive for the virus?

The Board will recommend home or clinic isolation of any animal with positive test results.

Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I have COVID-19?

Although there have not been reports of pets becoming sick with COVID-19 in the U.S. it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick. If you are sick with COVID-19, avoid contact with your pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them.

These guidelines were developed with input from multiple state animal and public health officials. In particular the Minnesota Board of Animal Health and MN Department of Health.

Latest Updates and Additional Resources

The COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly and this guidance may be updated as needed.

CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>)

MSDH: https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,0,420.html

MS Board of Animal Health <http://www.mbah.ms.gov/>

MS Department of Agriculture and Commerce <https://www.mdac.ms.gov/covid19/>

US Department of Agriculture: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/SA_One_Health

Compendium of Veterinary Standard Precautions for Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel (<http://nasphv.org/Documents/VeterinaryStandardPrecautions.pdf>), published by the

National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians includes infection control plan templates and disinfectant guidelines

American Veterinary Medical Association: COVID-19 (<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19>), with additional suggestions for modifying clinic traffic

CDC: Animals and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>)

CDC: When and How to Wash Hands (<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>)