



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Division of Animal Health

April 27, 2020

Guidance for Testing Animals for SARS-CoV-2

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), in partnership with the Department of Health Services (DHS), provides the following guidance for testing animals for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus causing COVID-19).

Currently, routine testing of animals is *not* recommended, and any tests done on animals will be approved on a case-by-case basis. Human-to-animal transmission events are believed to be rare, and there is no specific treatment for animals diagnosed with a SARS-CoV-2 infection, so testing will not alter clinical management. Decisions to test animals for SARS-CoV-2 will be made using a One Health approach.

[Owner advice and education](#) regarding care for animals during the COVID-19 outbreak can and should be provided regardless of testing decisions. Testing of animals requires use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), which is in limited supply. Across the U.S., animals are only being tested in rare circumstances.

The Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released guidance for [evaluation of SARS-CoV-2 testing in animals](#). Wisconsin animal and public health officials will use the criteria outlined by our federal partners as one component of the decision making process. Other considerations include local/state resources needed for sample collection; if there is a cluster of animal illnesses; if the animal was exposed to a cluster of human illnesses; and if other diagnostic testing has been performed.

Criteria for Considering Laboratory Testing for SARS-CoV-2 in Animals

1. Animals in a mass care or group setting (e.g., animal shelter, boarding facility, animal feeding operation, zoo) where there is a cluster of animals showing clinical signs of a new concerning illness that may be compatible* with a SARS-CoV-2 infections.
2. An animal that has had exposure to a setting or environment that is considered high risk for human COVID-19 exposures/outbreaks, such as a nursing home or other communal residence setting, **AND** the animal has clinical signs of a new concerning illness that may be compatible* with a SARS-CoV-2 infections.
3. The animal is threatened, endangered, or an otherwise imperiled/rare animal in a rehabilitation or zoological facility and has had a possible exposure to SARS-CoV-2 through an infected person or animal. Testing may be considered with or without clinical signs of a new concerning illness that may be compatible* with a SARS-CoV-2 infection.
4. An animal that has had close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19, **AND** the animal has clinical signs of a new concerning illness that may be compatible* with a SARS-CoV-2 infections.



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**The clinical spectrum of illness for SARS-CoV-2 remains largely undefined in animals. Clinical signs more likely to be compatible with SARS-CoV-2 infection in mammalian animals may include: fever, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, lethargy, sneezing, nasal discharge, vomiting and diarrhea.*

Veterinarians should first conduct a thorough diagnostic work up to rule out more common causes of the illness.

Sample Collection, Test Confirmation and Reporting Requirements

- Refer to USDA's [FAQs on Companion Animal Coronavirus Testing](#) for more information about requested sample types, who should collect samples and PPE.
- All non-negative results require confirmatory testing by the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL). If samples are sent to the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (WVDL), private or commercial laboratories for initial testing—depending on where samples are submitted—they may need to be collected in duplicate to ensure adequate sample is available for confirmation by NVSL.
- SARS-CoV-2 is a disease foreign or exotic to Wisconsin and is thus reportable within 24 hours to DATCP (ATCP 10, Appendix A).
- USDA is responsible for reporting any animal that tests positive for SARS-CoV-2 in the United States to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).
- All non-negative results are also reported to DATCP, DHS, USDA and CDC. To report non-negatives to DATCP, call (608) 224-4872 or email DATCPanimalimports@wisconsin.gov.

Providing Owner Education

Veterinarians testing an animal must consider their [advice to the owner if the animal tests positive](#).

These conversations should begin before making the decision to test. It is important that the welfare of the animal not be compromised as a result of testing. This includes ensuring animals are not harmed or abandoned due to fear of, or receipt of, a positive test.

For animals with clinical signs that can be managed safely at home (those with mild illness), the decision to sample and test would require a veterinary encounter that is not otherwise indicated.

Additional Resources and Information

- [DHS COVID-19](#)
- [DHS: What pet owners need to know](#)
- [DHS: I have COVID-19; is my pet at risk?](#)
- [DATCP COVID-19 Animal Health](#)
- [CDC COVID-19: If you have animals](#)
- [CDC COVID-19: Evaluation for SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Animals](#)
- [CDC COVID-19: Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Veterinary Clinics During the COVID-19 Response](#)
- [CDC FAQs: COVID-19 and Animals](#)
- [WVMA COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [AVMA COVID-19: What veterinarians need to know](#)
- [AVMA Recommendations](#)
- [OIE Q&A COVID-19](#)



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