Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Department of Agriculture
Guidance Document for COVID-19 Testing of Animals

KEY POINTS
Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some coronaviruses cause flu-like illness in people, while others cause illness in certain types of animals such as cattle, camels, and bats. There is a new coronavirus believed to have mutated from bats that is now affecting humans. The scientific name of the new strain of coronavirus is SARS-CoV-2. In people, the disease caused by the virus is commonly referred to as COVID-19.

We are aware of a very small number of pets outside of the United States, as well as other animals in the United States, that have become infected after close contact with people infected with COVID-19. To date, there is no evidence that pets can spread the virus to other animals or people. It is human-to-human contact that spreads the COVID-19 virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working with human and animal health partners to monitor this situation and will continue to provide updates as information becomes available. Further studies are needed to understand if, and how, different animals could be affected by COVID-19.

Currently there is no scientific basis to support widespread testing of animals. However, there may be limited situations in which testing would be appropriate. The purpose of this document is to describe the most likely justifications for SARS-CoV-2 testing and provide guidance to veterinary practitioners and the public. These guidelines shall apply to all SARS-CoV-2 testing proposed for domestic animals within the State of Oregon. All animal testing will be conducted by the Oregon State University, Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (OSU OVDL), unless an exception for testing at an alternative laboratory is approved by the Oregon State Veterinarian and Oregon State Public Health Veterinarian.

TESTING ANIMALS FOR SARS-CoV-2
The decision to test an animal will be authorized by the Oregon State Public Health Veterinarian, Dr. Emilio DeBess and Oregon State Veterinarian, Dr. Brad LeaMaster.
Authorization for testing will be conducted on a case-by-case basis

The justifications for testing include:

a) Clinical work-up with appropriate diagnostic testing has ruled out common causes of the patient’s signs of disease AND history strongly suggests exposure to SARS-CoV-2.
b) Atypical pattern of disease suggesting a novel pathogen present in a mass care situation, such as an animal shelter, and common causes of illness have been ruled out by appropriate diagnostic testing. Testing results shall be provided with the application.
c) Atypical pattern of disease suggesting SARS-CoV-2 present among recently imported animals, and common causes of illness have been ruled out by appropriate diagnostic testing. Testing results shall be provided with the application.

VETERINARIAN AUTHORIZATION

Contact Dr. Emilio DeBess, State Public Health Veterinarian to request animal testing. Once the decision is made to test, the veterinarian will be advised on how to collect samples with proper PPE (eye protection, mask, gown, and gloves in a closed room).

- Dacron swabs will be used to collect a deep oral or nasal sample
- Swabs will be placed in a sterile tube with ¼ cc of saline
- Close the tube and refrigerate
- A fecal sample may be included if available
- Complete the OSU OVDL form
  o Requests should contain the following information:
    - Animal owner’s name, address, email address, and phone number
    - Animal’s name, species, age, sex
    - Animal’s location if different from the owner’s address
    - Veterinarian’s reason for testing the animal(s)
    - Findings of physical, radiographic, or sonographic examinations and any
    - Complete patient history

Clean and disinfect the room after sample collection has been completed.
LABORATORY AND REPORTING

- OSU OVDL will conduct initial animal testing.
- SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) detection in any animal is reportable.

Positive Results

- Will require confirmation through additional testing by U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL).
- Will only be reported publicly when confirmed by NVSL and information has been communicated with the Oregon State Veterinarian and the Oregon State Public Health Veterinarian. Owner, household, and veterinarian’s personal information will be kept confidential.
- Information will be shared with the USDA, American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), CDC and National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials (NASAHO) for unified messaging and understanding of COVID-19 human/animal transmission.

MANAGEMENT OF ANIMALS IN COVID-19 POSITIVE HOUSEHOLDS

If an animal has a positive result we will not remove the animal from the home.
- AVMA guidance suggests dogs should be walked outside for elimination and exercise but direct contact with other companion animals should be avoided as a best practice to protect animal health.
- Feces should be collected using gloved hands or a bag and disposed of immediately.
- Ideally, these dogs should be walked in a dedicated area that can be readily sanitized and is separate from the general animal population.

MESSAGING

- At this time, there is no evidence that companion animals, including pets, can spread COVID-19 to humans.
- The reason for testing animals for COVID-19 is to:
  - Gain an understanding of the prevalence of infected dogs and cats in COVID-19 infected homes and shelters in Oregon.
  - Understand the role of companion animals in virus transmission, if any.