

AAVLD Task Force Interim Guidance

Indication for and management of SARS-CoV-2 testing of animals in the United States and Canada

At this time, the American Association of Laboratory Veterinary Diagnosticians (AAVLD) does not recommend routine or blanket testing for SARS-CoV-2 of any animal species in North America. AAVLD strongly encourages adherence to the USDA guidelines for testing on an individual, case-by-case basis, as described below.

All AAVLD laboratories have limited resources to maintain core animal health capacities while assisting our human health peers respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in people. SARS-CoV-2 testing of animals in large numbers will compete for, and diminish, resources available for the United States and Canada to respond to the pandemic in people.

Purpose for testing, a key element in the validation of diagnostic tests that is to establish diagnostic sensitivity and specificity, has not been determined for SARS-CoV-2 testing in animals. Routine testing of sick animals is not warranted unless there is an epidemiologic link to a COVID-19 human as outlined below.

Involvement of the State Animal and Public Health Officials is critical for authorization of testing of an animal of any species. Justification for testing should be communicated to those officials in each state for a collaborative and highly targeted testing, when needed. Justification for testing may include:

- Common causes of the patient's clinical signs have been ruled out and the history strongly suggests exposure to SARS-CoV-2.
- Atypical pattern of disease suggesting a novel pathogen in a mass care situation, such as an animal shelter. The request for diagnostics should include a preliminary rule out of common causes of illness.
- Atypical pattern of disease suggesting SARS-CoV-2 infection of recently imported animals. Appropriate diagnostic should be used for preliminary rule out of common causes of illness.
- Testing is part of approved research projects gathering scientific information to better understand if and how pets could be affected by SARS-CoV-2 and help clarify the role, if any, of pets in human COVID-19. The project should have approved biosafety and animal care and use protocols.

Further guidance for veterinarians: COVID-19 is an OIE notifiable disease. All presumptive positive results require confirmation by the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories. Because animal-to-human transmission has not been observed in the current outbreak, testing for SARS-CoV-2 should be limited to animals that meet one or more of the four criteria above. Routine testing without a defined purpose can hamper the national and international response and may cause harm (such as abandonment) to the welfare of pets.

References:

1. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fanimals.html
2. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/faq-sapho-on-companion-animal-testing.pdf