

AAVLD Perspectives on COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2)

March 23, 2020

AAVLD COVID-19 Task Force*

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to update AAVLD members and the public on issues facing AAVLD laboratories and personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Animal Diagnostic Testing:

Per USDA, to date “There is no evidence to support that domestic animals, including pets, might be a source of infection with SARS-CoV-2. To date, there have not been any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick, and there is no evidence that domestic animals, including pets, can spread SARS-CoV-2.” We recommend the pet owning public be referred to the referenced USDA information document: “FAQ on Companion Animal Coronavirus Testing”. In addition, state officials in charge will be following USDA guidance based on another referenced USDA information document: “FAQ for State Animal and Public Health Officials on Companion Animal Testing”. Some state veterinary labs have already been asked to conduct animal testing to help public health officials answer questions on specific matters, such as pet health status of companion animals in nursing homes or assisted care facilities. It is important to note that any animal testing for SARS-CoV-2 must not compete with human diagnostic testing for kits and reagents due to current shortages and availability issues.

Supporting Public Health Labs:

The capacity of AAVLD member laboratories to conduct high throughput molecular diagnostic and other testing rapidly is largely due to our periodic need to rapidly eradicate highly infectious diseases in our food animal populations; such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in 2014-15. The testing technologies employed by human health and animal health labs are largely identical. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are some discussions among political leaders to engage animal health labs to augment the capacity of public health labs. These discussions are complicated because they involve balancing the need for human health lab support with the need to ensure that our food production system (and hence ability to feed the nation and the world) remains strong. In addition there are issues of authorization and liability that must be clarified. While these may vary from state to state it is important to note that the ultimate decision to approve human testing in veterinary laboratories is determined by each individual state after clarifying all state and federal regulations. The FDA on March 16th issued guidance transferring authority for approving human testing to state authorities in an effort to streamline expansion of human testing.

Impact on Veterinary Diagnostic Lab Operations:

AAVLD laboratories, like other workplaces, have to prepare to adapt to the direct impacts of COVID-19 on their own personnel and operations. Unlike some other public services, the option to work from home for a laboratory is much more limited. The samples to be tested and the equipment to do so are in the laboratory, and the laboratory is the only safe place to conduct such work, with rare exception. This work is essential because these laboratories are part of the food production system as well as the public health surveillance system. Animal diagnostic labs may be facing personnel shortages if COVID-19 occurs in the laboratory’s community or workplace. As is already apparent, another issue will be supply chain continuity for some laboratory supplies, reagents and PPE. A NAHLN/NVSL taskforce led by

NAHLN and NVSL leadership is addressing tests and testing issues and working with the AAVLD laboratories to answer technical issues surrounding SARS-CoV-2 testing on animal samples.

Recommendations

The AAVLD strongly urges all veterinary diagnostic laboratories to establish and maintain effective communications and coordination with their state and federal animal health and public health authorities, taking direction on prioritization of testing and utilization of resources from them. All reasonable efforts should be made not to compete with human health laboratories for critical supplies and materials while still maintaining the capability to conduct surveillance for and respond to high consequence animal diseases. To the extent possible, ensuring the continuity of food production and the protection of animal health and welfare, public health and a viable economy remains the primary mission.

***AAVLD COVID-19 Task Force**

Deep Tewari
Francois Elvinger
Shuping Zhang
Beate Crossley
Jerry Saliki
Bruce Akey
Tim Baszler
Pat Halbur
Christina Loiacono
Mia Torchetti
David Zeman

AAVLD POSITION STATEMENT ON COVID-19

AAVLD labs continue to play a critical role in food safety, animal and human disease prevention and emergency management. In line with the OIE recommendations ([link below](#)) released on March 18th, 2020, AAVLD maintains that the activities of veterinary diagnostic laboratories are essential and must be maintained.

The American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD) is a world leader in advancing the discipline of veterinary diagnostic laboratory science to promote global animal health and One Health. With the United States and the world currently being swept by the COVID-19 pandemic, the AAVLD continues to promote improvements by active communication with members and stakeholders, raising public awareness about veterinary diagnostic laboratories' roles in animal health and public health during these times.

References:

USDA FAQ on Companion Animal Coronavirus Testing (PDF)

USDA FAQ for State Animal and Public Health Officials on Companion Animal Testing (PDF)

COVID-19 CDC Information for Labs: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/index.html>

FDA guidance on testing (March 16th 2020): <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/emergency-situations-medical-devices/faqs-diagnostic-testing-sars-cov-2>

OIE Guidance on animal infections <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>

COVID-19 and veterinary activities designated as essential: <https://www.oie.int/en/for-the-media/press-releases/detail/article/covid-19-and-veterinary-activities-designated-as-essential/>