

COVID-19 FAQ

Published: 01/01/2021

Last updated: 25/01/2023

Last reviewed:

Common questions on COVID-19 and cats

Note: *These recommendations are based on the ABCD guidelines on SARS-CoV-2. [The guideline is freely available online](#) and is updated regularly as new data are published.*

What is the risk of a SARS-CoV-2 positive person infecting his or her cat?

Naturally occurring SARS-CoV-2 infections in domestic cats have been reported in numerous countries, usually in cats living in households where there are SARS-CoV-2-positive people. To reduce the risk of infection, people with COVID-19 should avoid close contact with pet cats. Risk factors for SARS-CoV-2 infection of cats in COVID-19 households include frequent daily contact, higher numbers of household members with COVID-19 and cats sleeping in their owners' beds.

What is the risk of a SARS-CoV-2 positive cat infecting his or her owner?

A risk assessment assessing the potential of cat-to-human transmission of SARS-CoV-2 concluded that the risk of infection of a person in a household associated with keeping a domestic cat is very low to negligible, depending on the intensity of cat-to-human interactions. The only case in which it was likely that SARS-CoV-2 positive cat infecting a person was a veterinarian who was infected with SARS-CoV-2 after the infected cat she was treating (the cat had a high viral load following recent exposure to its infected owners) sneezed in her face.

What are the clinical signs linked to SARS-CoV-2 infection in cats?

Experimental infections of cats with SARS-CoV-2 have generally shown that infected cats developed no or mild clinical signs. However, both respiratory and gastrointestinal signs have been reported in naturally infected cats from COVID-19 households. A national surveillance study conducted in the US reported that approximately half of cats infected with SARS-CoV-2 displayed clinical signs, with sneezing and lethargy being the most common signs.

What should (self-isolating) SARS-CoV-2 positive people do if they have a cat?

If an owner who is ill with COVID must continue to have close contact while caring for their pet, they should minimise contact with their cat, only handle animals when wearing a mask, wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after being near or handling their animals, their food, or their supplies, as well as avoiding kissing their pets or sharing food, towels or the bed with them. Cats from COVID-19 households that usually have outdoor access should continue to be allowed outside, even if their owners are self-isolating. This will avoid causing stress to both the owner(s) and their cat(s) and will decrease the likelihood of human-to-cat transmission.

What should be done with the cat if the owner needs to go to hospital?

If the patient lives alone or needs to be hospitalised, the cat should remain at home and be cared for by friends or family of the patient, observing basic hygiene measures upon entering/leaving the home. It is not recommended to rehome, isolate or even euthanise cats in these circumstances.

Can cats carry the virus on their fur and should they be disinfected?

It is not thought that transmission can occur via pets. Cats themselves should not be disinfected, only inanimate materials. However, in COVID-19 households, strict hygiene should be observed by the owners (washing hands after contact with cats) and close physical contact with cats (e.g., licking face, sharing food or towels) should be avoided.

Should vets be testing such cats routinely?

At present, it is recommended that cats should be tested for SARS-CoV-2 infection according to guidelines from the appropriate public health authority; recommendations vary between countries. In general, testing can be considered in cats with signs of respiratory disease that have tested negative for common respiratory infections and that have been exposed to people with known or suspected COVID-19.

What measures should cat owners take in COVID-19 affected areas?

There is a risk of cats contracting SARS-CoV-2 from their owner, but the risk is minimised if standard hygiene measures are observed: avoid very close contact (e.g., licking face, sharing the bed, food or towels), washing their hands with water and soap for at least 20 s (the WHO recommends even 40 s) before and after being near or handling their animals, and regularly cleaning the litter box. These measures will minimise the risk of any zoonotic diseases.

Acknowledgement

ABCD Europe gratefully acknowledges the support of Boehringer Ingelheim (the founding sponsor of the ABCD), Virbac and IDEXX.