

Important!

Corona Virus—What you need to know in Animal Health Facilities

There is now evidence of widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the United States. Infected people can spread COVID-19 through their respiratory secretions, especially when they cough or sneeze. According to the CDC, transmission is most likely to occur via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes---the same way influenza and other similar pathogens may be transmitted. These droplets can land in the mouth or nose of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. In addition, they may contaminate surfaces (armrests, tables, door handles, etc.) that are touched by another individual who then contracts the disease.

While the virus seems to have emerged from an animal source, it is now being spread from person-to-person. Presently, there is no reason to believe that animals, including pets, might be a source of the infection. To date, CDC has not received any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with the virus. However, since animals may spread other types of disease (zoonoses) to people, it is always important to wash your hands immediately after handling animals and practice standard infection control protocol.

Places of employment, including animal health facilities, may be ideal for the spread of disease. Below are recommendations for how to stop transmission:

- **Communication with pet owners and employees**
 - Provide training on occupational safety and health (OSHA training) that includes infection prevention, to all new employees and annual training to all employees.
 - Schedule a training session as soon as possible with all of your team members to discuss best practices for COVID-19 prevention.
 - Review the proper use and disposal of personal protective equipment (PPE) for all employees.

- The animal health team should advise pet owners and employees who are experiencing acute respiratory illness, including symptoms of fever, cough or shortness of breath, to remain home and reschedule appointments.
- Should a symptomatic pet owner appear in your facility, give them a mask, ask them to put it on and let them know that they must leave and seek guidance from their medical professional.
- **Emphasize staying home when sick, proper respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene for all employees:**
 - Place posters that encourage correct cough/sneeze etiquette as well as proper hand hygiene at the entrance to your workplace.
 - Provide tissues, no-touch disposal receptacles and alcohol based hand rub for use by pet owners in your waiting room.
 - Instruct employees to clean/disinfect their hands between patients with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol. Remember that soap and water should be utilized if hands are visibly contaminated and must always be used before eating and after toileting
 - Implement a non-punitive sick day policy and encourage employees who display symptoms of respiratory illness to stay home.
 - Provide soap and water as well as alcohol-based hand rubs in multiple locations throughout the workplace.
 - Advise employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.
- **Perform environmental surface cleaning and disinfection and eliminate potential areas of transmission:**
 - It appears that the COVID-19 may live on hard surfaces, at room temperature, for up to several days.
 - Throughout the day, disinfect high touch surfaces in the waiting room (arm rests, doorknobs, countertops, etc.), if someone has sat there.
 - Make sure that the disinfecting agent you are using is on the EPA's List N. List N includes products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19

- Remove all non-essential items from the waiting room (i.e. magazines, toys, prize boxes, etc.)
- Consider having only one pet owner in the waiting room at a time or, if possible, have them walk directly into the treatment room with their animal.
- Have those accompanying the owner wait in their car
- Remove some waiting room chairs so that “social distancing” of at least 6 feet can be maintained.

