

Guidelines for Testing Animals for COVID-19

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture does not have plans to conduct widespread testing of animals for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19).

Currently, pets and livestock are not thought to be involved in COVID-19 transmission to other animals or to people.

At this time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) do **not** recommend routine testing of companion animals for COVID-19.

Should testing of a companion animal be requested, the Tennessee State Veterinarian and the State Epidemiologist will work together to make a joint decision.

Authorization for testing will be considered on a case-by-case basis

- When requested by a **private veterinarian** who is reporting a new, concerning illness that cannot be otherwise explained.
 - **AND** the companion animal has had close contact with a person with confirmed or probable COVID-19 infection.
 - **AND** testing for infectious diseases that commonly cause companion animal illness has been conducted to rule out COVID-19.
- When requested by **academic institutions** for the purpose of research.
 - The proposal, sampling criteria, animal species and scope of the project will be outlined prior to authorization.
 - Researchers will establish an endpoint for each study in conjunction with TDA based upon time and date or number of animals/households tested.
 - If the scope of the project, the testing criteria, or the endpoint changes, the State Veterinarian must authorize those changes.

Veterinarian Authorization

- Once the decision is made to test, the State Veterinarian will authorize and designate a state-appointed veterinarian, USDA accredited veterinarian, or Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostician (FADD) to collect the sample using appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Sample collection methods will be verified with guidance from the State Veterinarian's office.
- Official sampling will follow USDA guidance.

Laboratory and Reporting

- Initial testing will be done in cooperation with another state or federal animal health laboratory approved to conduct animal testing.
- TDA will provide test kits on a limited basis to the appropriate veterinarian if requested testing is approved.
- Detection of COVID-19 in any animal is reportable per guidance from the World Organisation for Animal Health.
- Positive results will require confirmation through additional testing by USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) and will only be reported publicly when confirmed by NVSL and after the information has been communicated with the State Veterinarian and the State Epidemiologist.
- TDA will communicate positive results to USDA, AVMA, CDC and National Assembly State Animal Health Officials (NASAHO).

Management of animals in COVID-19 positive shelters or households

TDA will defer to guidance provided by AVMA and CDC concerning the management of animals in shelters or households in which a human has tested positive for COVID-19.

That guidance includes, in part:

- If you are ill, have another member of your household care for your pet.
- Limit direct contact with your pet. Don't share food or bedding with your pet, or kiss or hug them.
- If you must care for your pet yourself, wear a facemask and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after any contact.
- There is no guidance currently available regarding quarantine of test positive dogs, cats, or other pets. TDA will follow any guidance provided by the USDA and CDC if new information becomes available.
- If a companion animal has a positive result, TDA 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 an area that can be readily sanitized and is separate from the general animal population.

General information for pet and livestock owners

Currently, pets and livestock are not thought to be involved in COVID-19 transmission to other animals or to people.

Pet and livestock owners should always follow best practices for the handling and care of their animals. Guidelines include maintaining a clean living environment, providing access to fresh water and appropriate nutrition, disposing of waste immediately, and thoroughly washing hands after touching animals, animal equipment, or animal feed or treats.