Current status of animals and COVID-19

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Four reports or pre-print publications in the scientific press show that cats can be infected with SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 in humans.

The new findings provide valuable information regarding the potential role of cats in COVID-19 and suggest questions to pursue more closely. Can they be infected? Do they develop clinical disease from the infection?

Despite this early information, there is still no evidence that cats can transmit COVID-19 virus to humans, as indicated by extensive epidemiology trace-back investigations of human cases of COVID-19 around the globe.

Here is additional key information about the COVID-19 virus and pet and zoo animals to date:

- Two dogs and one cat and one cat in Belgium that were all living with persons diagnosed with COVID-19 were reported to be infected with SARS-CoV-2 by laboratory testing.

- One report from China shows that domestic cats can be experimentally infected with high doses of SARS-CoV-2 and transmit the virus to other animals in a close experimental setting.

- One report from China showed that 15 of 102 (14.7%) of cats sampled from January to March 2020 during the Wuhan COVID-19 outbreak developed antibody immune responses to SARS-CoV-2 indicating they were infected with SARS-CoV-2 at some time previously. This also means too, the cats’ immune systems responded to the virus and produced antibodies to combat it. No active infections were identified.

- One tiger from a zoo in New York City was reported infected with SARS-CoV-2 while being cared for by a COVID-19 infected person. The tiger was at this writing, also showing mild signs of respiratory disease.

None of these findings indicate that companion or zoo animals can, under natural conditions, transmit SARS-CoV-2 to humans. Rather, it appears from these reports that
animals can become infected from COVID-19 infected humans, what scientists call a reverse zoonotic infection.

Information regarding the role of animals in COVID-19 is rapidly changing currently as more data is acquired.

Out of an abundance of caution if you are ill with COVID-19 you should limit your contact with pets and other animals as much as possible.