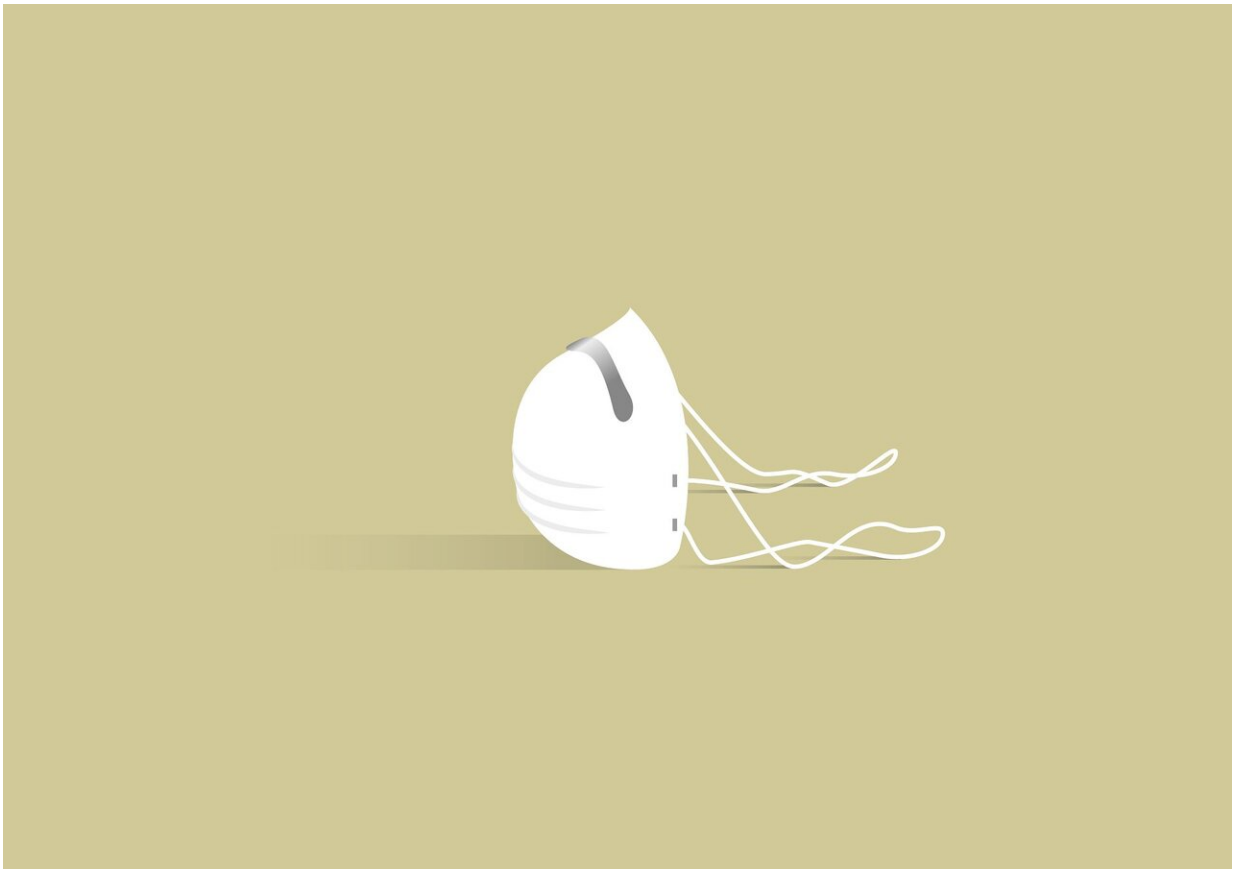


# You likely won't get COVID-19 from your pets—but you could give it to them

May 29 2020, by Bev Betkowski

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Worried about catching COVID-19 from your cat or dog? You shouldn't be, says a University of Alberta expert.

While COVID-19 is believed to have originated from some type of animal, the risk of catching the disease is greater from another human than from a pet, said Simon Otto, a veterinary epidemiologist and assistant professor with the U of A's School of Public Health.

"As we have seen with other outbreaks like SARS that did come from an animal source, once it got into the [human population](#), it was spread from person to person, as opposed to moving back and forth between humans and [animals](#)."

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there is currently no evidence to suggest that any wild, livestock or pet animal native to Canada harbours the virus that causes COVID-19, nor is there evidence that pets or other animals can spread the virus.

Instead, current epidemiological knowledge suggests that household pets could be at risk of infection from their humans, as shown in recent cases of dogs and cats, including two in the United States where, Otto noted, there was some evidence the animals were infected by owners who had COVID-19.

A study in China suggests cats and ferrets are susceptible to the virus and could spread it to people, but that's not known for sure, and it's highly unlikely that your cat would bring a new COVID-19 infection into the house, said Otto.

He said cats, dogs, livestock and birds carry their own forms of coronaviruses that can sometimes cause serious illness in the animal, but don't pose a threat to humans.

"The coronaviruses in these animals are distinct from the virus that causes COVID-19," said Otto.

The companionship and mental health benefits of having a pet outweigh the risk of catching COVID-19 from it, Otto believes.

"There's more risk in going out in public than to having a dog or cat in the house."

That includes for elderly or immune-compromised people—two groups at risk of suffering severe COVID-19 illness if infected, Otto noted.

"There aren't a lot of reports of disease outbreaks in immune-compromised people linked to their pets. It's not a general recommendation that they should get rid of their pets—and that has not changed with COVID-19."

It's also a good idea—as always—to wash your hands after handling your pet, cleaning kitty's litter box or picking up the dog's poop, and before handling food, he added.

For owners of feathered pets, the China study noted that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 replicates poorly in ducks, so other birds probably wouldn't be very susceptible to carrying it, said U of A virologist David Evans.

Nor are pet reptiles like lizards and snakes likely to host the virus, since their core body temperatures aren't as stable as in warm-blooded mammals, and their biology is different, making it difficult for the virus to replicate, he added.

People who are infected with COVID-19 should self-isolate from Fluffy or Fido as they would from other family members in the home, Otto said. "Those rules still apply."

## **Livestock and farms**

To date, there have been no reports of livestock in Canada being infected or getting sick with COVID-19 and no known risk of transmission from livestock to humans. The China study found that chickens and pigs were not infected by the COVID-19 virus.

"The most important action farmers can take is practising good infection prevention and [control measures](#) to minimize the risk of disease transmission to and within their herds, and they already do a good job of that," Otto said.

However, producers need to put a plan in place for keeping COVID-19 away from their farms to protect themselves and their employees.

"Traditional family farms are run by a small number of people with seasonal workers, and introducing COVID-19 could seriously affect the seasonal nature of production and the need for daily animal feeding and care, threatening the livelihoods of these businesses, especially in small communities where these farms rely on support from neighbours," Otto said.

"They need to think about how they can put public health protections in place. If they have staff, are they required to self-isolate before they start seasonal work? What are employees doing outside of their working hours for physical distancing? You don't want them bringing something to the farm."

Workers should have separate machinery and tools when possible, clean them daily and practise physical distancing.

Hobby farms should follow the same precautions, avoid buying or selling animals from different farms for now, and adopt a phone-ahead, driveway delivery system for produce they may be selling, like eggs.

The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that producers limit access to their property by all non-essential people and specifically exclude those who:

- have travelled abroad in the last 14 days
- are ill, especially with symptoms of COVID-19
- have been in contact with a confirmed or suspected case in the last 14 days

Producers who are sick or self-isolating should have someone else care for their animals if possible. If not, they should follow basic infection prevention and control measures:

- Minimize your direct contact with animals.
- Always wash your hands before and after touching animals, their food and supplies.
- Practise good respiratory hygiene.
- Put on clean clothes and boots before going out to the barn.
- Keep your farm equipment separate from your neighbours'.

## **How to keep your pets safe from COVID-19**

The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) offers these tips:

- Do not let pets interact with people or other animals outside the household.
- Keep cats indoors when possible to prevent them from interacting with other animals or people.
- Walk dogs on a leash, maintaining at least six feet from other people and animals.
- Avoid dog parks or public places where a large number of people and dogs gather.
- If you are sick with COVID-19 (either suspected or confirmed

by a test), restrict contact with your pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.

- When possible, have another member of your household care for your pets while you are sick.

Provided by University of Alberta

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