



GEORGIA VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Serving Georgia Veterinarians Since 1906

VIRTUAL TOWN HALL ON COVID-19 3/26/2020

Shelters/Animal Specific Q&A

Please note that there are answers in this document that have now changed due to the Executive Order issued by Governor Brian Kemp on Thursday, 4/2. We will strike through what was valid on 3/26 and provide the correct answer as of 4/2.

Panelists:

- **Dr. Robert Cobb**, *State Veterinarian*
- **Mark Murrah**, *Georgia Department of Agriculture Manager, Companion Animal/Equine*

Q: **Can companion animals (dogs, cats, etc.) or livestock get the new coronavirus?**

A: **(Cobb)** There is no evidence to support that domestic animals including pets might be a source of infection with SARS-CoV-2. To date, there have not been any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick, and there is no evidence that domestic animals including pets can spread SARSCoV-2.

Q: **Is it a threat to livestock or animals?**

A: **(Cobb)** At this time, there is no reported evidence of pets or other domestic animals (livestock) becoming sick from COVID-19 or as a source of infection. There have been reports of dogs with weak positive tests from China; however, no serological conversion has been demonstrated. A private lab (IDEXX) has reported thousands of tests of dogs and cats performed for SARS-CoV-2 on animals. All have been negative.

However, please keep in mind that animals in close contact with humans that are sick, may become contaminated by droplets from coughing, etc. More research is needed to determine if this is a risk for infection. At this time, there is no evidence that animal skin or fur can spread the virus.

Just like social distancing with people, practicing healthy habits such as washing hands and cleaning up after handling animals are recommended to aid in preventing the spread of the virus. CDC, AVMA, USDA and Georgia Department of Public Health have some very good guidance. Better to err on the side of caution until more research can be accomplished.

Q: **Scientific opinion on life of virus on inanimate objects/dogs as fomites—what is proper decontamination of canines and prevention washing?**

A: **(Cobb)** More research is needed. The virus is not hardy and is easily killed with disinfection. Similar to other coronaviruses, it is thought to live up to 9 days on



GEORGIA VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Serving Georgia Veterinarians Since 1906

inanimate objects. High temperatures and high humidity (sounds like Georgia) may decrease increase the virus' survivability. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Respiratory droplets is the main pathway.

At this time there is no evidence to support that animal skin or fur can spread the virus.

For disinfection of inanimate objects (doorknobs, counters, etc.), emerging virus approved disinfection products should be used after cleaning. A list can be found at EPA. Appropriate PPE should be used, and healthy habits should be followed (wash hands and equipment afterward). Use dedicated equipment.

For washing of canines or other domestic animals, routine bathing should be adequate. Animals from an infected household should remain in the household if possible to minimize the risk of spreading the virus. If this is not possible and the animal comes in from an infected household, appropriate PPE should be worn during bathing and animals should be segregated – just as you would when around a person.

Q: How is my shelter restricted by law at this time?

A: (Murrah) Your shelter must comply with the Governor's executive order that states that no business, establishment, corporation, non-profit, corporation, or organization shall allow more than ten (10) persons to be gathered at a single location if such gathering requires persons to stand or to be seated within six (6) feet of any other person.

Q: Should shelters continue doing spay/neuter, TNR, adopt animals out that aren't altered?

A: (Murrah) Georgia shelters are not allowed to practice TNR unless they provide an outgoing record that gives the name, address, and contact information of the new owner. So essentially, TNR isn't allowed by licensed Georgia Animal shelters. Also shelters should limit people coming in to bring in animals since they increase the risk of COVID-19 being transferred.

If an owner has tested positive for COVID-19, keep the animal at home if there is another caregiver do not bring to a shelter/animal control unless there is no one available to care for the animal.

Although we are aware that NACA and other groups may recommend that unaltered animals be released during the Covid-19 event at this time there is no exemption to the Georgia Sterilization Act that requires that the shelter make provisions for the sterilization of all dogs and cats acquired from such shelter by



GEORGIA VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Serving Georgia Veterinarians Since 1906

providing sterilization by a licensed veterinarian before relinquishing custody of the animal or entering into a written agreement with the adopter of the animal guaranteeing that sterilization will be performed within 30 days after acquisition. We have had requests from shelters that want to place more animals in foster. GDA has allowed virtual foster inspections to facilitate the addition of temporary fosters. It is worth mentioning that GDA cannot issue exemptions to a GDA rule or regulation. That said, we may be able to promulgate emergency rules in certain dire situations.