



Position Statement: Testing of Animals for SARS-CoV-2

Revised: November 20, 2020

Background:

The Canadian Council of Chief Veterinary Officers (CCVO) provides veterinary leadership to Canadian animal health and welfare networks on key and emerging issues and serves the public interest by providing strategic direction on animal health and welfare in Canada through scientific assessment, information sharing and consensus building across governments.

The COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic is a human health crisis. The spread of COVID-19 is being driven by human-to-human transmission. Currently, there is no evidence that animals play any significant role in propagation of the pandemic. A growing number of reports suggest that certain animals (including cats, dogs and mink) in close contact with humans infected with SARS-CoV-2 may test positive for the virus (1). There is limited information available describing the epidemiology of this virus in animals. Further research is underway to inform our understanding of this virus in animals including species susceptibility and transmission pathways. The present CCVO position statement reflects the current understanding of the information and risks that SARS-CoV-2 represents to animals. As new information becomes available, the position statement may be revised if changes in risk are identified.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has developed more precise guidance to inform diagnostic approaches (2). Rapid qualitative risk assessments have also been completed for different species and continue to be updated as new information becomes available (3-5).

Position: Testing of animals¹ for SARS-CoV-2 is not recommended.

Rationale:

- Public health testing must be the priority to protect human health and prevent and slow the rate of SARS-CoV-2 transmission. Any animal testing initiative must consider overall resource availability.

¹ Includes livestock, horses, wildlife, companion and zoo animals



- The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is driven by person-to-person transmission; based on current data the overall risk for human infection through animal contact is low, but there are certain scenarios that may be higher risk (3-5).
- In general, with the exception of farmed mink (6), test results will not change the clinical management of individual animals (e.g. companion animals) or change the recommended measures to manage the potential risks if an animal tests positive.
- Collection of samples from companion animals from households with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in a person can increase the risk of person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 through associated human interaction and travel.
- There is the risk of stigmatizing animals that test positive for SARS-CoV-2 which could damage the human-animal bond or compromise animal welfare.

The CCVO recognizes there may be some exceptional circumstances that may warrant testing for SARS-CoV-2 in animals or that could be valuable for research purposes, based on a One Health approach (7).

Clinical testing or clinical research on SARS-CoV-2 in livestock animals, including horses, should not be performed. Specific concerns regarding clinical testing or clinical research initiatives in livestock must be discussed with the provincial or territorial CVO and federal authorities.

Testing may be considered in animals under the following circumstances:

- The animal has a history of exposure to a person or animal suspected or confirmed to be infected with SARS-CoV-2, AND
 - There is an animal health concern based on clinical signs not explained by other etiologies as assessed by diagnostic procedures performed by a veterinarian AND testing will inform public health action, OR
 - The animal is part of a cluster of animals showing compatible clinical signs not explained by other etiologies as assessed by diagnostic procedures performed by a veterinarian, OR
 - The animal is part of an endangered species, OR
 - Testing will significantly contribute to advancing the understanding of the epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2 in animals, OR
 - Testing will inform the need for public health and animal health disease control activities that may alter the current recommended measures to manage potential risks (e.g. therapy animals)



For testing to occur, it is recommended that provincial or territorial animal health and public health authorities first be consulted to assess whether testing is warranted. In addition, ***the following requirements should be met:***

- Reporting mechanisms are in place to inform provincial or territorial authorities of positive results to support coordination between animal health and public health authorities.
- Before any public announcement of a suspect positive animal sample, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) must be contacted in order to validate the result at a federal laboratory and allow Canada to meet its international reporting obligation to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).
- A plan for managing positive cases has been determined before conducting testing.

REFERENCES:

1. [COVID-19 and animals: FAQ for veterinarians \(19-Jun-2020\)\(Canadian public and animal health working group\)](#)
2. CFIA [Interim Guidance for Laboratories Testing Animals for SARS-CoV-2 \(May-2020\)](#)
3. CFIA [Rapid qualitative risk assessment summary: SARS-CoV-2 in Companion Animals \(28-Apr-2020\)](#)
4. CFIA [Rapid qualitative risk assessment summary: SARS-CoV-2 in Farmed Mink \(20-Aug-2020\)](#)
5. CFIA [Rapid qualitative risk assessment summary: SARS-CoV-2 in Livestock \(30-Sep-2020\)](#)
6. Guidance for managing SARS-CoV-2 infections in farmed mink in Canada (Dec-2020)(Canadian public and animal health working group)[*not posted*]
7. [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Evaluation for SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Animals \(12-Aug-2020\)](#)
8. VSEN SARS-CoV-2 case definition for animals (02-Sep-2020) [*not posted*]



Annex 1:

Contact information for provincial and territorial CVOs

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1. <https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Productions/santeanimale/centrale/Pages/Fichedesignalementsanteanimale.aspx>