



Council of Chief Veterinary Officers

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

Date: April 28, 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 to suggest that animals can transmit SARS-CoV-2 to humans. A small number of reports have suggested that animals in close contact with humans infected with SARS-CoV-2 may test positive for the virus. 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 CCVO is working collaboratively with public health counterparts to establish more precise guidance to inform diagnostic approaches as well as advocate for important research.

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.
- The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is driven by person to person transmission with current data suggesting that the risk for human infection through animal contact is low.
- Testing animals for SARS-CoV-2 may consume the personal protective equipment and supplies needed for safe sampling and testing in people.
- In general, test results will not change the clinical management of the animal or change the recommended measures to manage the potential risks if an animal tests positive.
- There is the risk of stigmatizing animals that test positive for SARS-CoV-2 which could result in damaging the human-animal bond or threatening animal welfare.

The CCVO recognize there may be some exceptional circumstances that may warrant testing for SARS-CoV-2 or could be valuable for research purposes.

Testing or research on SARS-CoV-2 in livestock animals including horses, should not be performed. Specific concerns regarding livestock testing must be discussed with the provincial or territorial Chief Veterinary Officers and federal authorities.

Under the following circumstances testing may be considered:

- Testing is deemed to contribute to advancing the understanding of the epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2 in animals.
- 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.
- 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 there is a need which will inform public health action.
 - The animal has had contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19.
- In specific circumstances, an asymptomatic animal that could have been exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus may be tested if it is:
 - part of a cluster of animals showing compatible clinical signs
 - part of an endangered species
 - in a special situation such as therapy animals in close contact with vulnerable people.

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

For testing to occur the following requirements should be met:

- Provincial animal health and public health authorities have assessed the situation and agree that testing is warranted.
- 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 Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).
- A plan for positive cases should be determined before conducting testing.

References:

<https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/covid-19-animals-faqs-veterinarians>

Annex

Provincial /Territorial CVO contact list

Province	Name	Email	Phone
British Columbia	Dr. Brian Radke	brian.radke@gov.bc.ca	778-666-0544
Alberta	Dr. Keith Lehman	keith.lehman@gov.ab.ca	708-427-6406
Saskatchewan	Dr. Betty Althouse	betty.althouse@gov.sk.ca	306-535-3476
Manitoba	Dr. Lisa Joachim	lisa.joachim@gov.mb.ca	204-794-1591
Ontario	Dr. Cathy Furness	ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca cathy.furness@ontario.ca	1-877-424-1300
Quebec	Dr. H�el�ene Tr�epanier	Please send message through link below ¹	1 844 ANIMAUX 1-844 264-6289
New Brunswick	Dr. Steven Scott	steven.scott@gnb.ca	506-453-5412
Nova Scotia	Steven Tattrie	steven.tattrie@novascotia.ca	902-890-1575
Prince Edward Island	Dr. Carolyn Sanford	cjsanford@gov.pe.ca	902-628-7072
Newfoundland	Dr. Beverly Dawe	beverlydawe@gov.nl.ca	709-637-2042 or 709-639-2121
Yukon	Dr. Mary VanderKop	mary.vanderkop@gov.yk.ca	867-667-5600
Northwest Territories	Dr. Brett Elkin	brett_elkin@gov.nt.ca	867-767-9055 ext 53014
Nunavut	Wanda Joy	wjoy@gov.nu.ca	867-222-2373

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