

Animal Health Update: Free SARS-CoV-2 PCR Testing for Animals to Resume July 1st, 2023
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Key Points

- VPH will resume free SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) PCR testing for animals on July 1st. Testing may last two years.
- VPH is partnering with animal care organizations all over Los Angeles County including shelters and rehabilitation facilities to conduct surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 in animals.
- It is important to conduct surveillance for this emerging disease in animals to prevent the establishment of animal reservoirs and monitor for new variants that could impact human health.
- SARS-CoV-2 surveillance in companion animals is valuable because pets have close contact with humans and serosurveys have shown 40-50% of owners infect their pets with SARS-CoV-2. Additionally, animal-to-animal transmission as well as animal-to-human transmission has been documented in cats and hamsters (among other species).
- VPH is interested in testing cats and dogs with a known exposure to COVID-19, as well as any pocket pet, wildlife, or marine mammal (regardless of exposure).
- Please reach out to us by email (vet@ph.lacounty.gov) or phone (213-288-7060) if you have an animal you'd like to test for SARS-CoV-2.

Dear Colleagues,

Los Angeles County Veterinary Public Health (VPH) is proud to announce we were awarded a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to continue the important work of surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) in animals. **VPH will resume free SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing of animals on July 1st**, and testing may continue for two years.

Through our previous grant with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE), we tested 616 animals across various wildlife, marine mammal, and domestic species. Four animals were positive for SARS-CoV-2 by PCR: two cats, one dog, and one sea lion. There was an additional positive in a dog that was brought to a local veterinarian after two days of lethargy and inappetence. This dog was tested for SARS-CoV-2 through a commercial lab at the owner's expense, but VPH can offer this testing for free.

While five positives may not seem like much, and animals are not thought to play a significant role in transmission of the virus, it is important we continue surveillance for this emerging disease in animals to **prevent the establishment of new animal reservoirs** and **monitor for new variants that could have an impact on human health**.

Additionally, owners infecting their pets with SARS-CoV-2 may be more common than we think – serosurveys have shown **up to 40-50% of pet cats and dogs in COVID-19 positive households**

test positive by serology^{1,2}. Experimental and field studies have documented animal-to-animal transmission in many species including cats and hamsters, and small numbers of humans appear to have been infected by animals including two humans during an outbreak in hamsters in Hong Kong and a veterinarian who was infected by a cat in Thailand³⁻⁶.

Please consider partnering with us on this exciting project. VPH is interested in testing cats and dogs with a known exposure to COVID-19, and all pocket pets (regardless of exposure). VPH is also partnering with animal care organizations all over Los Angeles County including shelters and rehabilitation facilities to test wildlife and marine mammal species. This grant is a wonderful opportunity that furthers our mission of monitoring for a variety of emerging and imported diseases in animals in Los Angeles County.

Please reach out to us by email ([vet@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:veter@ph.lacounty.gov)) or phone (213-288-7060) if you have a patient you would like to test, or if anyone from your practice would like to have their personal pet tested.

VPH is excited to explore this One Health opportunity with you.

References

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Sincerely,

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