Animal Health Update: Free SARS-CoV-2 Surveillance Testing for Animals Ending Soon – Get Samples in by March 15, 2023

1.20.2023

Key Points

- Free testing for SARS-CoV-2 in animals by LA County Veterinary Public Health will end on March 15, 2023. About 80 free tests are still available until that date.
- Cats and dogs who were recently exposed to someone with COVID-19 and all pocket pets are eligible.
- Personal pets of veterinary clinic staff are also eligible for testing!
- VPH applied for additional grant which may allow for free SARS-CoV-2 testing to resume, with a target start date of May 2023.
- SARS-CoV-2 surveillance in animals is important to monitor for new subvariants of the virus that may have One Health implications.

Dear Colleagues,

Los Angeles County Veterinary Public Health (VPH) is nearing the end of its Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grant, which funded local surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in animals throughout 2022. **VPH will continue to conduct free SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing of animals through March 15, 2023.**

As of January 19th, 2023, VPH has tested 519 animals across various species including wildlife, marine mammals, pocket pets, and domestic cats and dogs, and has found one positive PCR test in an exposed dog. While cats and dogs have been shown to be susceptible to SARS-CoV-2, with up to 40% of dogs and 50% of cats becoming infected after exposure to a person with COVID-19 in their household, the virus is not detectable by PCR for very long (1-4). The ideal testing window to detect SARS-CoV-2 infection in pets is 6-10 days after exposure.

VPH needs to test roughly 80 more animals to reach its grant objective of 600 animals. VPH is very interested in working with veterinary practices to test pocket pets (regardless of COVID-19 exposure) and cats and dogs (with a recent known exposure).

Your personal pets are eligible for testing as well!

Please reach out to us by email (vet@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 recently applied for a grant from the USDA that would allow us to continue surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in animals. Should VPH be awarded the grant, testing will resume with a target

start date of May 2023. Please consider partnering with us. Although negative results may not seem exciting, this is still valuable information from a public health standpoint.

Surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 in animals is critical given how relatively new the virus is, that it likely emerged from animals and could do so again, and that it triggered a panzootic (i.e. the infection of multiple species worldwide, not just humans) (5). SARS-CoV-2 has proven to spread unpredictably in animals, most notably when it spread rapidly among wild deer (6).

While the risk of animals transmitting SARS-CoV-2 to humans currently appears to be low, there have been a few isolated reports in which wild deer, farmed mink, a domestic hamster, and a domestic cat appeared to have infected small numbers of humans (7-10).

Since SARS-CoV-2 has a well demonstrated capacity to mutate and form new subvariants, the virus must continue to be monitored in all species, not just humans. In addition, it is vital to monitor for novel species that can become infected with the virus and determine the One Health significance of such findings.

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

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Thank you for your continued efforts to keep animals and humans healthy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate your assistance in learning more about this virus and how it impacts both animals and people.

Sincerely,

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