

## 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

**COVID-19 is continuing to spread throughout the world.**

**There is no evidence that animals play a role in spreading this human disease.**

### **Summary:**

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a family of RNA viruses. CoV infections are common in animals and humans. Some strains are zoonotic, but many strains are not.

In December 2019, human cases of pneumonia of unknown origin were reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China and a new coronavirus was identified as the causative agent. Since then, human cases have been reported worldwide, with the WHO officially declaring the outbreak a pandemic on Wednesday 11 March 2020.

The novel coronavirus has been given the scientific name SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 refers to the disease caused by the virus.

Current evidence suggests that the COVID-19 virus has an animal source. Genetic sequence data reveals that the COVID-19 virus is a close relative of other CoV found circulating in *Rhinolophus* bat (horseshoe bat) populations, and it is possible that an intermediate host then caused the spillover to humans. Further investigations are underway to identify the animal source and establish the potential role of an animal reservoir in this disease.

### **Companion animals and COVID-19**

To date, the spread of COVID-19 has been the result of human-to-human transmission. There is currently no evidence that animals can spread the disease, and therefore there is no justification in taking measures against animals, which may compromise their welfare.

On 1 March 2020, OIE received a report from the Veterinary Services of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China that a dog had tested positive on oral and nasal swabs to the COVID-19 virus following close interaction with its owners, who were infected with COVID-19. Repeat testing confirmed the positive status (excluding possibilities of

environmental contamination); however, there is no evidence that the dog is contagious to humans or other pets. Likewise, there is no current evidence that dogs or other domestic companion animals would show signs of disease. Further work is underway to better understand if and how different animals could be affected by COVID-19 virus.

The COVID-19 virus has not been reported in domestic animals or wildlife in Australia.

### **Guidelines for veterinary personal biosecurity**

COVID-19 is resulting in a shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as P2/N95 respirators.

Veterinary practices should review their infection control plans and ensure that all risks associated with zoonotic infections are prevented or minimised and that they comply with legislation relating to workplace health and safety. A stocktake of PPE should be undertaken, and plans implemented to ensure the longevity of supplies, in the event that restocking will be limited in the immediate future.

Employers have an ethical and legal duty of care to ensure health and safety for all in the workplace. In the absence of appropriate PPE, certain procedures may need to be avoided, delayed or modified.

Horse owners should be reminded of the importance of vaccinating against Hendra, especially if a shortage of PPE means that veterinary staff may not be able to safely attend to unvaccinated sick horses.

Finally, sound hygiene and biosecurity measures should be maintained as routine work practice. These should include:

- Regular hand washing
- Maintaining standards of cleanliness and stable hygiene, and
- Cleaning and disinfecting equipment

The NSW Government continues to work with national and international agencies to provide the most up to date information as the situation rapidly evolves.

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