**General shelter protocol for handling animals from COVID-19 positive homes**

**General principles**

1. There is no evidence that companion animals serve in the transmission of SARS-COV2 to people. Human to human transmission, followed by fomite transmission, remains the greatest risk for spread and amplification of this virus.
2. Cats, in rare cases, have demonstrated they can become infected with SARS-COV2, and, at least in laboratory settings using a high infectious dose, transmit it to other cats.
3. Dogs, in very rare cases, have demonstrated they can become infected but this seems a very low risk.
4. People who have been exposed or who are sick with COVID-19 should practice physical distancing from their pets to minimize risk to their pets.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – general notes**

1. Use routine PPE when handling animals from COVID-19-positive homes.
2. The use of gloves combined with handwashing is recommended.
   1. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after handling a companion animal.
   2. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
   3. Hands should always be washed after removing gloves.
3. Use of protective overgarments, such as gowns or coveralls, is advised. These should be washed between uses. Review of donning and doffing of PPE is recommended for staff.
4. When handling animals with signs of respiratory disease with possible SARS-COV2 exposure, use of a facemask and face shield or googles in addition to basic PPE is advised.

**Removal of animals from the home**

Agencies should follow guidance provided by their public health department including the state public health veterinarian or designated health official to minimize the risk to staff.

1. Whenever possible, avoid entry into the home where a person with COVID-19 has lived within the last 3 days.
2. If there are currently people still living in the home, practice physical distancing a minimum of 6 feet from residents and limit contact with the home or household items.
3. If collecting the animal involves interacting with people from COVID-19 infected households or being exposed to home environments contaminated with the virus, utilize PPE including mask, over-garments, and gloves.
4. Wipe down with disinfectants the outside of transport equipment such as carriers prior to and following transport. Leave other items such as leashes, bowls, and miscellaneous items when possible. Any additional items should be disinfected or laundered or allowed to sit for up to 3 days prior to handling.
5. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, even if gloves were utilized. Use hand sanitizer if hand-washing is not possible.

**Intake Exams**

1. Wear gloves and gowns or coveralls while doing intake exams and treatments in order to reduce contagious disease risks.
   1. Launder re-usable gowns or coveralls before reuse.
   2. Wash hands with soap and water after gloves are removed and discarded.
2. Do not bathe animals or use disinfectant topically on intake because of COVID-19 concerns. There is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can spread to people from the skin or fur of pets.
   1. Disinfectants licensed by the EPA must be used in accordance with their label directions. Many disinfectants have the potential to cause significant harm if direct contact with human or animal skin occurs. It is inappropriate to apply liquid disinfectants directly onto animals.
3. Routinely clean and sanitize animal intake areas and equipment between animals.
4. Be sure animals from COVID-19 positive homes are properly identified on cage cards and other paperwork and housed in designated wards.

**Housing daily care**

1. Animals from COVID-19 positive homes should be housed in an area separate from the rest of the shelter population for 14 days from the point of last exposure. Double-sided housing is preferred to minimize handling and allow spot-cleaning.
2. Designate separate wards per species for housing these animals.
3. When possible, dedicate separate staff for animals from COVID-positive homes or ensure hygiene precautions for staff that move between groups.
4. Walk dogs outside for elimination and exercise but avoid direct contact with or between these animals as a best practice.
5. For cats, minimize handling by using double-sided housing and spot cleaning when possible. If cats develop signs of upper respiratory disease and require treatment or other close handling, staff should wear a face-shield or googles in addition to mask, gown, and gloves.
6. Routinely clean and disinfect animal areas. Cleaning dirty surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice. Coronaviruses are readily inactivated by disinfectants typically used in animal shelters.
7. Increase cleaning and disinfection of surfaces frequently touched by people (e.g. light switches, door knobs, keyboards, etc) to reduce exposure to/from humans.

**Humane Outcomes**

1. When possible, reunite sheltered companion animals with their owners at the early possible point.
2. Hold animals from COVID-19-positive homes in the shelter for 14 days prior to being adopted or sent to a foster home. This is the “abundance of caution” model from the CDC.
3. If animals are transferred to another agency prior to 14 days from the point of last contact with a COVID-positive home or person, holds should be completed in a ward in the new facility separate from non-exposed animals. Animals from known COVID-positive homes still in the 14-day hold period should not be exposed to other animals during transport. (Further guidelines for transport coming from the ASPCA)

**Illness and testing**

1. The CDC, USDA, and AVMA all advise that companion animals NOT be routinely tested for SARS-COV2 at this time.
2. If a companion animal has had close contact with a person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 and develops illness during their shelter stay, the shelter staff should work with their veterinarian and appropriate state public health or animal health authorities to determine whether testing for SARS-COV2 is indicated.

**References**

**NACA document on removing pets from homes.** [**https://www.nacanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/8.Removing-Pets-from-Homes-of-Residents-that-are-or-Suspected-to-be-Infected-With-1COVID-19-2.pdf**](https://www.nacanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/8.Removing-Pets-from-Homes-of-Residents-that-are-or-Suspected-to-be-Infected-With-1COVID-19-2.pdf)

**CDC donning and doffing PPE posters.** [**https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppe-sequence.pdf**](https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppe-sequence.pdf)

**CDC Guidance for Veterinary Clinics.** [**https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/veterinarians.html**](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/veterinarians.html)

**AVMA and CDC Guidelines for Intake of Animals from COVID-19 positive homes.** [**https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/interim-recommendations-intake-companion-animals-households-humans-COVID-19-are-present**](https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/interim-recommendations-intake-companion-animals-households-humans-COVID-19-are-present)

**UW collection of shelter medicine collaborative materials on COVID-19 and sample protocol.** [**https://www.uwsheltermedicine.com/library/resources/animal-services-role-in-covid-19-support#kitten**](https://www.uwsheltermedicine.com/library/resources/animal-services-role-in-covid-19-support#kitten)