

# DO ANIMALS GET CORONAVIRUS?

**There is no evidence that animals can be infected with the coronavirus that is now in circulation. But we should err on the side of caution, says virologist Wim van der Poel of Wageningen Veterinary Research. He and his colleagues are going to study whether and how animals can catch the virus, as part of the efforts to develop a vaccine.**

## *Do animals play a role in transmitting this coronavirus?*

‘We don’t have any data from China showing that pets and livestock can be infected with SARS-CoV-2 (the official name of the virus that causes COVID-19 – ‘coronavirus disease-2019’ in full, ed.), or that they are a source of infection for humans. But that is something that calls for further research.’

## **Coronavirus patients should keep contact with pets to a minimum, including stroking and cuddling**

### *A dog in Hong Kong did test positive for SARS-CoV-2.*

‘At present it is not clear whether the dog was really infected, or whether it was a case of an environmental contamination, with the virus getting onto the dog’s mucous membranes through contact with the owner.’

### *It is compulsory to report any case of an animal testing positive for coronavirus.*

‘Vets who suspect that a dog or cat is showing symptoms after contact with a

coronavirus patient can get in touch with us. If an animal tests positive, we will report this to the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Organization, which will pass the information on to the World Organization for Animal Health.’

## *Are you getting a lot of requests for testing now?*

‘Up to now we have tested just one dog, and it didn’t have the virus. We also got a request recently to test ingredients for animal feed and foodstuffs. There are no indications that the virus is spread via food, but apparently some countries want to err on the side of caution and are tightening up import requirements.’

## *You are going to research how animals react to the virus?*

‘In collaboration with an international consortium, we are going to research whether and how animals get infected. We are doing those tests in the context of vaccine development because new vaccines have to be tested on animals first. People are working on developing vaccines in various places around the world. The consortium spreads the odds of success so we can produce a vaccine as fast as possible.’

## *What should a pet owner or a farmer do if they catch the virus?*

‘Even though there is no evidence that pets play a role in spreading the virus, coronavirus patients are advised to keep contact with pets to a minimum, including stroking, cuddling and letting them lick you. If possible, leave pet care to others in the house who are not sick. The same advice applies to livestock farmers. Better safe than sorry.’ **TL**

