

**For discussion
on 22 June 2021**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights**

**Arrangements for pet animals whose owners are subject to
quarantine due to coronavirus disease 2019**

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members of the Subcommittee on the arrangements and relevant measures for pet animals whose owners are subject to quarantine due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

BACKGROUND

2. Although experts believe there is evidence of human-to-animal transmission of COVID-19¹ for mammals², there is currently no evidence that pet animals are transmitting COVID-19 to humans or other animals. The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has also indicated, at present there is no evidence of pets playing an epidemiological role in the spread of COVID-19.

**SERVICES OFFERED TO PETS OF QUARANTINED
INDIVIDUALS**

3. In order to safeguard public and animal health, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been adopting a precautionary and vigilant approach for animal management related to COVID-19. The department has all along been working and liaising closely with the Department of Health, whilst referring to recommendations of the OIE regarding pet quarantine. As a precautionary measure, if a pet owner is confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 or placed under quarantine at a quarantine centre pursuant to the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A), and if the

¹ Veterinary surveillance of the coronavirus disease 2019 in countries around the world have detected cases not only in dogs and cats, but also in wildlife at zoos and farmed animals.

² Such as dogs, cats, hamsters and rabbits etc.

pet is a mammal, then subject to the consent of the pet owner, AFCD will arrange to deliver the animal concerned to a designated animal keeping facility for quarantine and veterinary surveillance. As for non-mammalian pet animals (such as birds and turtles), although there is no evidence they can be infected with the virus concerned, AFCD can also temporarily take care of them. These quarantine, surveillance, and temporary care services are offered free of charge.

4. During quarantine, AFCD will collect oral, nasal, rectal and faecal samples from mammalian pet animals to test for COVID-19 virus. Upon satisfactory results of veterinary surveillance and testing, and when the owner (or his/her authorized person) is ready to receive the animal, the pet concerned will be returned. As for animals tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, they will be closely monitored by AFCD's veterinary officers and undergo repeated testing, and will only be returned to their owners upon consecutive negative results, proving they are no longer carriers of the virus³. As at end of May 2021, AFCD provided quarantine and veterinary surveillance services to 386 cats, dogs and other mammals. Among them, 17 animals, including 9 dogs and 8 cats, tested positive for COVID-19 virus, but none of them displayed relevant symptoms.

5. Furthermore, AFCD assisted the University of Hong Kong to develop a coronavirus disease 2019 testing method for animals, which can safely and accurately detect neutralizing antibodies in animals from blood samples. AFCD has adopted this new method when testing animals that had tested positive for COVID-19 virus.

ANIMAL QUARANTINE AND KEEPING FACILITIES

6. Pet animals tested positive for COVID-19 virus will be sent to AFCD's animal keeping facility at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port, for quarantine and veterinary surveillance. In addition, AFCD's New Territories South Animal Management Centre was used as an animal quarantine centre from July 2020 to March 2021 and animals originally kept in the centre were transferred to other animal management centres during that period. During quarantine and veterinary surveillance, the animals are separately kept and managed, and AFCD will conduct daily

³ In March last year, AFCD and the World Health Organization reference laboratory at the University of Hong Kong confirmed that a dog was infected with COVID-19 virus. This was the first confirmed COVID-19 pet animal case in the world. AFCD collaborated with the University of Hong Kong and City University of Hong Kong, conducting research on pet animal infection of COVID-19 and publishing the relevant observations in scientific journals.

cleaning and regular sterilization of the facilities. AFCD will also check the animals' health conditions every day and provide medical treatment if needed. AFCD's dedicated team which includes veterinary surgeons will take turns to take care of the animals in the two quarantine centres. As at end of May 2021, 386 animals in total were placed under quarantine and veterinary surveillance, including 173 dogs, 166 cats, 31 hamsters, 10 rabbits, 4 chinchillas, 1 hedgehog and 1 guinea pig. At the same time, AFCD also temporarily took care of 148 non-mammalian pet animals for quarantined individuals, including birds, turtles and fish etc.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

7. To enhance public communication, AFCD has been uploading information for pet owners' reference, such as latest developments on animal infection of COVID-19, pet quarantine arrangements etc., to AFCD's dedicated website on pet keeping and animal management (www.pets.gov.hk) over the past year. Furthermore, AFCD issued letters to local registered veterinary surgeons regarding latest developments of COVID-19, recommending them to stay highly vigilant and adopt appropriate precautionary measures, and to report any unusual situation detected in any animal to AFCD. AFCD also issues press releases from time to time, reminding pet owners to always maintain good hygiene practices and to seek timely veterinary advice regarding changes in health conditions of their pets, and under no circumstances should they abandon their pets.

ADVICE SOUGHT

8. Members are invited to note and comment on the contents of this paper.

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