

## COVID-19 pandemic: stop panic abandonment of household pets

Household pets during COVID-19

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**Teaser:** panic abandonment of household pets during the COVID-19 pandemic is not justified.

COVID-19 caused by SARS-CoV-2 was declared a pandemic in March 2020. Large droplet transmission and contact transmission are the two main routes of transmission. SARS-CoV 2 can persist on inanimate surfaces for up to 9 days.<sup>1</sup> However, the main spread is thought to be due to human-to-human transmission, and therefore implementing non-pharmaceutical measures that interrupt human-to human chains of transmission is the mainstay to contain this outbreak.<sup>2</sup>

A dog owner was tested positive for COVID-19 on 25 February 2020 in Hong Kong. Her pet dog, a Pomerian, was tested “weak positive” on 28 February 2020, suggesting a potential human to animal infection.<sup>3</sup> The dog had no symptoms, but was quarantined at a government facility and finally tested negative. A second dog and also four cats were tested positive in Hong Kong after being cared for by their COVID-19 test positive owner; all remained asymptomatic.<sup>4</sup>

Such reports could lead to panic abandonment of household pets. Indeed, in Wuhan, we observed many pets being abandoned during the recent outbreak. But what is the evidence that household pets contribute to the transmission of COVID-19? SARS-CoV, a coronavirus very similar to SARS-CoV-2 that caused the SARS outbreak in 2003 in China, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Toronto, was also shown to result in household pets being tested positive for SARS.<sup>5</sup>, which triggered panic abandonment of such pets. However, no dog-to-human transmission was shown, and SARS was successfully contained by the focus of interrupting human-to-human transmission.<sup>6</sup>

Animal welfare could be seriously threatened by social media panic and misinformation, and household pets could turn into another victim of this already devastating outbreak. Animal experts and the media should pro-actively take a stand to stop panic abandonment or killing of household pets during the COVID-19 outbreak.

As a precautionary measure, US Centers for Disease Control recommend that people with COVID-19 have someone else walk and care for their companion animals while they are sick. Frequent handwashing before and after contact with animals, and avoiding intimate contact, is crucial during this outbreak.

Currently, there is no evidence that household pets can transmit the disease to humans, Therefore, "there is no justification in taking measures against companion animals which may compromise their welfare," the World Organisation for Animal Health stated.<sup>3</sup> Panic abandonment of household pets is neither justified nor morally supported.

### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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### **Author contributions**

Study Design: XT Zeng; Data collection: Q Huang, X Zhan; Analysis and interpretation: Q Huang; Draft the manuscript: Q Huang, X Zhan; Review the manuscript: XT Zeng; Funds for: XT Zeng; all authors approved to submit the manuscript.

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