

Blood test result of pet dog with low-level infection of COVID-19 released

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said today (March 12) that the blood test result of a pet dog which had repeatedly tested weak positive for COVID-19 virus is negative.

The AFCD collected samples from the dog five times for tests since late February and detected low levels of the COVID-19 virus from its nasal and oral cavity samples. A blood sample was also taken from the dog on March 3 for serological testing and the result is negative. The negative result indicates that there is not a strong immune response and that there are not measurable amounts of antibodies in the blood at this stage.

The negative serological test result does not suggest that the dog has not been infected with the virus. It is known in some asymptomatic or mild cases of human infections with other types of coronavirus that antibodies may not always develop. It is also not uncommon in the earlier stages of infections to have a negative result as it often takes 14 days or more for measurable levels of antibodies to be detected. Another blood sample will be taken later for further testing.

On the other hand, the Department, together with the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong, has conducted gene sequencing of the COVID-19 virus found from the dog and its close contact persons who were confirmed infected. The viral sequences are very similar. The sequence results indicate that the virus likely spread from the infected persons and subsequently infected the dog.

The dog has not shown any signs of the disease related to COVID-19. It is currently under quarantine at the animal keeping facility at the Hong Kong Port of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. The Department will continue to closely monitor the dog which tested weak positive for the COVID-19 virus and repeat the test later. It will only be returned to its owner when the test result is negative. The Department has stepped up cleansing and disinfection of the facility.

COVID-19 is a newly emerged disease and the situation is still evolving. The AFCD will continue to work together with the Department of Health in handling relevant cases.

The spokesman reminded pet owners to adopt good hygiene practices (including hand washing before and after being around or handling animals, their food, or supplies, as well as avoiding kissing them) and to maintain a clean and hygienic household environment. People who are sick should avoid contacting animals. If there are any changes in the health condition of the pets, advice from a veterinarian should be sought as soon as possible.

The spokesman emphasised that there is currently no evidence that pet animals can be a source of infection of COVID-19 or that they can become sick. Apart from maintaining good hygiene practices, pet owners need not be overly concerned and under no circumstances should they abandon their pets.