

Low-level of infection with COVID-19 in Pet Dog

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said today (March 4) that a pet dog had repeatedly tested weak positive for COVID-19 virus which indicates a low-level of infection with the virus.

The AFCD first collected samples from the dog for tests on February 26, and detected low levels of COVID-19 virus from its nasal and oral cavity samples on February 27. The Department repeated the test on February 28 and March 2, and the dog's nasal and oral cavity samples, and nasal samples, respectively, tested weak positive for the virus. Experts from the School of Public Health of The University of Hong Kong, the College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences of the City University of Hong Kong and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) have been consulted, and unanimously agreed that these results suggest that the dog has a low-level of infection and it is likely to be a case of human-to-animal transmission. The dog has not shown any signs of 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.

There are two dogs under quarantine at the animal keeping facility at the Hong Kong Port of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge at the moment, which are staying in individual rooms. The other dog tested negative for COVID-19 virus. The Department has stepped up cleansing and disinfection of the facility.

The Department will continue to closely monitor the dog which tested weak positive for COVID-19 virus and repeat the test later. It will only be returned to its owner when the test result is negative. The other dog which tested negative for the virus will be tested again before release. To ensure public and animal health, the Department strongly advises that mammalian pet animals including dogs and cats from households with persons confirmed as infected with COVID-19, or close contacts of COVID-19 infected persons, should be put under quarantine in AFCD facilities.

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 restrict 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 become sick. Apart from maintaining good hygiene practices, pet owners need not be overly concerned and under no circumstances should they abandon their pets.