

## Pet dog further tests positive for antibodies for COVID-19 virus

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said today (March 26) that the latest positive serology test results of the Pomeranian which previously tested weak positive for COVID-19 virus proved that the dog has been infected with the virus.

Virus isolation was performed on previous samples taken from the Pomeranian with a negative result, indicating that no live virus was retrieved. This is in line with the amount of virus genetic material in the samples. Further serological testing has been conducted at the World Health Organization reference laboratory at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) on the blood sample taken on March 3 and the final test result is positive. This indicates that the Pomeranian had developed an immune response to the viral infection with antibodies found in the blood. Veterinary experts and scientists from the Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences of City University of Hong Kong, as well as the School of Public Health of the HKU, have concluded that the result further supported that the Pomeranian has been infected with the COVID-19 virus.

The spokesman also stressed that these cases of infection in dogs appear to be infrequent. As at yesterday (March 25), the AFCD has conducted tests on 17 dogs and eight cats from households with confirmed COVID-19 cases or persons in close contact with confirmed patients, and only two dogs had tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.

These findings indicate that dogs and cats are not infected easily with this virus, and there is no evidence that they play a role in the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, as COVID-19 is a newly emerged disease and the situation is still evolving, the AFCD is taking a precautionary approach in quarantining animals (mammals, including cats and dogs) from households with confirmed COVID-19 human 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. There is currently no evidence that pet animals become sick and under no circumstances should they abandon their pets.