



Sri Lanka VETERINARY ASSOCIATION

"Working for the advancement of the veterinary profession since 1940"

25th April 2020

Dear SLVA Members,

Our Role as Veterinarians in the view of Covid-19 Pandemic

There is a panic and confusion among general public in the country regarding the role of pets in the transmission of the SARS CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus. This situation got aggravated in the wake of a widely published media report stating that a positive dog was identified in Suduwella area today. As SLVA we would like to make a statement on how the veterinarians as animal health care professionals should react in this situation and convince the general public based on scientific evidence.

The global context

Several reports have emerged from Hong Kong, Belgium, and most recently, the United States, about positive tests in a handful of cats and dogs; and tigers and other big cats respectively, some with concurrent evidence of mild respiratory disease. In all of these cases, animals were living in homes with COVID-19 positive patients or handled by a care taker in a zoo who was shedding the virus. To date, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other global public health and veterinary organizations such as OIE, WVA and WSAVA have emphasized that there is no evidence that the pets can directly transmit this virus to the people whom they live with. Prospective trials are ongoing to objectively examine the prevalence of transmission of the virus from infected patients to household companion animals. In the long run, having more objective evidence will allow the veterinary community to discuss this risk with more clarity with our clients and others

Prevention of spreading the virus to pet animals

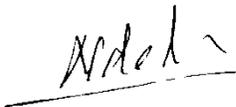
During this crisis, veterinarians have a responsibility to speak up within their practices, communities, and to the public at large to protect animals. Clear communication is required to inform clients and others that animal welfare must be ensured during this pandemic. Animals continue to need safe shelter, nutritious food, clean water, companionship and exercise, regardless of how this novel virus is impacting our communities. Communication should also emphasize that individuals sick with COVID-19 should distance themselves from their pets to minimize virus transmission, wash their hands before and after touching animals, keep cats indoors, maintain appropriate physical distances from other people when exercising their pets outside, and develop an emergency plan for how care will be provided for their pets in the event of serious illness. As veterinarians we are bound to ensure animal welfare and wellbeing while protecting ourselves adhering to the guidelines issued by human health authorities.

Making statements relying only on scientific evidence

As veterinarians, we should make statements to the general public, mass media or social media based only on scientific evidence. To date, pet animals are not proved be vectors of SARS CoV-2 virus infection (Covid-19). Presence of antigen (virus) does not confirm that the animal is infected as it could be a mere contamination. Furthermore, the specificity of the use of primers and probes which are used for human PCR testing are not validated for testing animals. As substantial amount of scientific information is lacking in this backdrop it is not advisable to make statements in mass media or social media which may lead to unnecessary panic among general public. We urge our members to refrain from issuing statements regarding the transmission of COVID -19 by animals especially pets to people, which may create unnecessary issues under the circumstances that the country is fighting against this pandemic with the limited resources.

Message to the veterinarians

Today being the World Veterinary Day which is a special day for our profession, we wish to encourage all the veterinarians to be united and help clear the ambiguous opinions among general public and educate the clients/owners of pets or other animals in this regard. At this critical moment, it is our prime duty to convey a message to the public that there is no risk of associating with animals if they are not Covid-19 patients. If the owner/handler is a Covid- 19 patient then there is a need to keep the animals at proper distance to prevent infecting them (especially cats, ferrets and dogs). It is reiterated that there is no evidence of transmission of the disease from domestic animals to human to date and hence, the animals should never be neglected and their welfare should be assured.



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Resources from;

World Health Organization

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