**Coronavirus and Pets: Should I be Concerned?**

Hello, it’s Shelby with Antrim Veterinary Hospital. During this crazy time, I’m sure you all have many questions regarding your precious pets and their safety. As long as you are taking the necessary precautions there is no need to rehome your favorite friend. Keep in mind that this virus is new to all and recommendations are constantly being updated but following is the most current information:

The coronavirus, I’ll call it CV19 for ease of this article, appears to be human to human transmission only. There appears to be only a minimal risk that humans can transmit the virus to dogs and cats. At the time this article was written only 2 cats and 1 dog had tested positive for CV19 in the US. That is next to nothing compared to the over 1 million people that have tested positive in the US. Therefore, the odds that your pet will become ill from you are very low. However, out of an abundance of caution, if you are ill, you should have another family member care for your pets and isolate yourself just as you would from the rest of your family. If your pet is a service animal or you do not have another person to care for them, wear a mask and do not hug or kiss them. Wash your hands before and after handling the pet. Keep at least 2 weeks’ worth of food and medications handy or your pet. That way, in case you are quarantined, you will have the resources to care for your pet.

On the flip side, currently there is no scientific evidence that suggests your dog or cat could be a source of infection for you. Although some studies show the virus can live on hard surfaces such as plastic for several days, the soft nature of an animal’s hair coat would make it difficult for the virus to be transmitted. The virus is what is call an enveloped virus which is easy to kill with soap and water and most common disinfectants. According the World Health Organization, transmission from respiratory droplets such as coughing and sneezing within 3 ft of someone is still thought to be the major mode of transmission which is why social distancing is so important. Infection by touching a contaminated surface then touching mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose, or mouth, may be possible but appears to not be as common. Smooth, non-porous surfaces could potentially transmit the virus better than porous surfaces such as pet hair. The American Veterinary Medical Association currently states there have been “no examples of where viruses have been transmitted by contact with pet hair or skin and, accordingly, no evidence that the virus that causes Covid-19 can spread to people from the skin or fur of pets.”

If your pet does become ill, it is not recommended at this time to test them for CV19. Since the virus is primarily transmitted person to person, animals are not suspected to spread the virus. If your pet is ill with respiratory signs it is much more likely they are dealing with something other than the coronavirus. Please be aware that as of April 20, 2020, veterinarians do not have the authority to test a pet without the permission of the state.

As with all viruses, the best defense is washing your hands and practicing good hygiene when interacting with your pet. The CDC recommends social distancing of 6 feet so include your pet in the 6 feet; do not allow them around other people or animals. Walks are still very important not only for exercise but also to stimulate your pet mentally. However, you should walk all dogs on a leash so you can enforce the 6ft rule, avoid dog parks and other crowded public places and keep your cats indoors to limit their exposure.

This virus has changed how we live and interact with each other. We gratefully thank all our clients for their patience during these trying times. As most of you know on April 1, 2020, the State Veterinary Board issued a statement advising all veterinary hospitals and clinics to immediately postpone all routine or elective surgical procedures and services and specifically noted spays, neuters, routine dental cleanings and routine vaccines with the exception of rabies and leptospirosis. We followed these guidelines because we felt obligated morally, legally, and ethically although it was hard to explain to clients why not all hospitals did so. Thankfully on May 7, 2020 the Board sent notice that veterinary practices may now resume wellness exams and elective procedures.

We are still following recommended social distancing and cleaning protocols, please call to find out how CV19 has changed how visits are being done.

What hasn’t changed? Our love for your pets and our commitment to keep them and you healthy, happy and safe!