



Position of the Risk Assessment Group-Covid-19 Animals (RAGCA) regarding the questions received in the context of the Informal videoconference of the members of the Working Party of Chief Veterinary Officers dedicated to Covid19 in animals

Document validated by the members of the steering group of the RAGCA on 12/05/2020

Context

Informal videoconference of the members of the Working Party of Chief Veterinary Officers – to be held on 15/05/2020

COVID-19 – relation to animals

In the light of a number of reports of SARS-CoV-2 positive test results in animals to the OIE the Presidency invites the CVOs to exchange their views, reflections and information on the influence of COVID-19 on the animal health sector, both in farm and companion animals.

We would also like to invite the Commission to provide information on its further plans and activities on COVID-19, including the possible issuing of additional guidelines to facilitate common approach of MS.

In order to better steer our discussion at the videoconference, we invite you to be focused on the following questions:

1. exchange of experience:

- a. Have MS authorities encountered similar possible suspected cases in animals?*
- b. Follow up actions on positive farms and monitoring of animal health status?*
- c. Other general/national measures put in place after confirming positive case in animals?*
- d. Ongoing research initiatives and possible preliminary results concerning the SARS-CoV-2 in animals (in particular disease transmission)?*
- e. National approach towards “private initiatives” as regards “surveys” for SARS-CoV-2 in animals, especially in companion animals?*

2. suggestions for further steps

- a. Need for a common approach for monitoring of the animal health status in kept animals in general (e.g. collecting dust and faeces samples to examine the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2, hygiene measures by animal keepers, farm workers but also veterinarians) and in particular in companion animals?*
- b. Need for a common approach on communication?*
- c. Need for common guidelines/action plan in case of positive test in animals?*

Proposed answers

1. exchange of experience:



a. Have MS authorities encountered similar possible suspected cases in animals?

Yes. One cat, both virologically and serologically confirmed as positive for SARS-CoV-2. Cat owner primarily infected by SARS-CoV-2 (coming back from a highly endemic region). Animal case reported to OIE and EC.

b. Follow-up actions on positive farms and monitoring of animal health status?

(Companion animal). Follow-up of the initial case first carried out through telemedicine (as the owner was also SARS-CoV-2 infected and in quarantine). Virus exposure of the cat confirmed by different test methodologies (seroneutralisation, immunoprecipitation, ELISA, immunoblotting).

c. Other general/national measures put in place after confirming positive case in animals?

Establishment of a (federal) Risk Assessment Group Covid animals ('RAGCA), gathering academics and members from authorities, to assess risks associated to SARS-CoV-2 in animals for Public Health and to collect all information about it. Preparation of recommendations and (scientific) opinions for risk managers/politics and public. Ongoing discussions within RAGCA on the possibility of a national specific legal framework.

d. Ongoing research initiatives and possible preliminary results concerning the SARS-CoV-2 in animals (in particular disease transmission)?

Homemade surveys (metagenomic studies, seroneutralisation assays, ELISA's) by Faculties of Veterinary Medicine (University of Gent and Liège) regarding samples coming from the field (anecdotal requests from practitioners following suspicion of SARS-CoV-2 infection). Samples are mainly coming from cats. Results: up to now (11/05/2020), initial feline case as the only virologically and serologically positive, all other cats from Flanders virologically negative and all cats analyzed so far from Wallonia serologically negative; cats as incidental and rare hosts for SARS-CoV-2 infection.

No planned regular surveys in pet population.

No planned regular surveys in farm animals population.

No information received on ongoing transmission experiments.

e. National approach towards "private initiatives" as regards "surveys" for SARS-CoV-2 in animals, especially in companion animals?

Delivery of an unofficial framework for pet testing (through recommendations of the RAGCA), request to communicate to the RAGCA both positive and negative results from the laboratories performing animal tests.

Ongoing discussions within RAGCA on the possibility of a national specific legal framework.

Ongoing discussion within RAGCA on the validation of tests to be carried out in animals



2. suggestions for further steps

a. Need for a common approach for monitoring of the animal health status in kept animals in general (e.g. collecting dust and faeces samples to examine the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2, hygiene measures by animal keepers, farm workers but also veterinarians) and in particular in companion animals?

YES. Vigilance is to be increased in both companion animals and farm animals. Investigation on the need to planned regular surveys depending on results from experimental studies (susceptibility, transmission, virus adaptation) and risk assessments.

General guidelines should be delivered ASAP to the sector (practitioners, animal farmers and workers, etc.) under the umbrella of a common legal framework. General guidelines regarding NRL and validation on tests to be carried out on animals.

b. Need for a common approach on communication?

NO. Communication can stand 'local' to concretely reach the field.

First of all, there is a need for targeted and specific information as well as for a common (legal) framework which are more important than a main communication, through FAQ for example. All local communication initiatives could be thereafter based on this European position.

c. Need for common guidelines/action plan in case of positive test in animals?

YES. BE plaids to consider SARS-CoV-2 as an emerging disease in animals. Need for a common legal framework.