

Health minister issued an order on the operation of cooperative and farmers' markets, farm land cultivation, uninterrupted livestock breeding and animal fodder production

Today, on April 6 2020, Health minister issued an order on the operation of cooperative and farmers' markets, farm land cultivation, uninterrupted livestock breeding and animal fodder production. The order gives instructions concerning the operation of cooperative and farmers' markets, the cultivation of agricultural land, the breeding activities and animal fodder production.

The Health minister's order states:

1. Each municipality should set up an organization for the functioning of the cooperative and farmers markets, taking into account the specifics such as location, capacity and number of participating producers for the direct supply of small quantities of raw materials and food to end consumers.
2. Based on the analysis under item 1 and in order to protect all the participants throughout the sellers-buyers chain, the following additional arrangements could be made:
 1. Expanding their area and placing information signs for the measures taken;
 2. Installing barriers to prevent crowding, as well as setting one-way lanes between stalls;
 3. Providing staff to control customers' access;
 4. Preventing food contamination;
 5. Keeping the required 2 m distance between sellers and buyers;
 6. Having sellers and buyers wear protective equipment;
 7. Practising personal hygiene and disinfection.
3. To enable farmers to access their arable land, and agricultural producers will be able to take to the market vegetables, fruits, planting stock and other produce of their own while complying with all requirements aimed at reducing the risk of Covid-19.
4. To ensure the uninterrupted raising of farm animals, produce processing and fodder production, when healthy farm workers are quarantined after being in contact with people with confirmed coronavirus, the workers may continue to work with guidelines regarding their movements from home to work, for which they will sign an undertaking, and their employer will provide working conditions safeguarding the rest of the staff. Compliance with personal hygiene requirements and use of personal protective equipment and disinfection is mandatory.
5. To revoke all additional restrictions which are at variance with the Health Act and with the March 13, 2020 State of Emergency Measures and Actions Act.
6. The order shall be communicated to the regional governors and mayors of enforcement, as well as to the Ministry of Interior, the directors of the regional health inspectorates and the regional food safety directorates for exercising control over the implementation.

Will the State of Emergency, due to COVID-19 outbreak disrupt the normal course of the 2020 Direct Payments Campaign and the acceptance of applications by farmers? 20.03.2020

In order to limit the risk of coronavirus spread and ensure an uninterrupted process of services to the beneficiaries, the District and Municipal Agriculture Services in the country will continue their work with citizens in compliance with the disinfection measures, as well as the recommendations of the health authorities. We encourage farmers to submit their applications for the 2020 Direct Payments Campaign electronically. The application guidelines, as well as the requirements for electronic data registration are published on the website of the State Fund Agriculture (SFA-PA) under the Direct Payments 2014-2020 Section and the Campaign 2020 sub-Section.

For farmers who do not have technical or physical ability to use the electronic services, provided by the SFA-PA, schedules for the submission of applications to the respective Municipal Agriculture Offices are prepared.

Should a decision to extend the deadline for direct payment applications be made, farmers should bear in mind that this will lead to:

1. Payments to farmers will be delayed and the main payment of the SAPS could not be authorized in December;
2. The deadline of animal retention period, which starts at the first day after the end of the campaign, is shifted, which in turn influences the proof of the animals that have been realized;
3. The deadline for launching Risk Analyzes on all schemes and measures in the application is shifted, which in turn influences the start of on-the-spot checks, as well as their completion on time, so that they can subsequently be used for timely authorization of these schemes and measures;
4. The start of cross-checks is shifted, the results of which are the basis for all other administrative checks, concerning the applications on the one hand, and on the other, there is a deadline for (31.07.) for publishing of a report on the declared cadastral properties.

In view of the above, and the organization arranged for application acceptance, at this stage MAFG does not intend to extend the deadline for the submission of documents under the 2020 Direct Payments Campaign.

Will payments under schemes and measures of the 2019 Direct Payments Campaign be made in the schedule published by the State Fund Agriculture? 20.03.2020

The State Fund Agriculture continues to make payments under the direct payment schemes and measures for Campaign 2019, according to the published indicative schedule. All schedules announced remain in force, as well as the terms for Campaign 2020, in accordance with Regulation No 5 of 2009 on terms and procedures for the submission of applications under schemes and measures for direct payments.

How will farmers be registered / re-registered? 20.03.2020

Farmers have the opportunity to submit documents for registration or re-registration under Regulation No.3 on establishment and maintenance of the register of agricultural producers as well as by e-mail. The aim is to make farmers not to go to the Municipal Agriculture Services .

Farmers, who are not able to submit their documents by e-mail can visit the offices, in compliance with all the disinfection measures of the health authorities. In this case, only one person is allowed to enter the building of the municipal office, and if there is no need of face to face communication, the documents should be left in a specially designed box. Another option for submitting re-registration documents is by using courier services and Bulgarian Post.

After processing the documents, the municipal employees send them to the Regional Agriculture Office for re-registration and then contact the farmers to inform them that their data has been uploaded to the register and the certification for the fiscal year has been completed. Documents may be taken after the end of the State of Emergency .

You may find contact information on the websites of the Regional Agriculture Offices.

In connection with the minimization of paper documents and the use of ex-officio data, where available, the possibility of printing the shortest version of the most voluminous data from the last year Questionnaire Forms of agricultural producers' file was provided. Regional Agriculture Offices also have the opportunity to provide and export the ex officio data in Table 1 (properties with legal basis), Tables 3 and 4 of the AF in the farmer's file. The data in Tables 3 and 4 refer to agricultural producers that raise animals with ear tags. Thus, farmers do not have to fill in paper documents.

In the absence of changes in the farmers' activities from the previous year, they may file a No Change Declaration upon registration, on the basis of which certification for 2019/2020 will be made.

How and where application forms for registration of rose producers, rose processors, oilseed flower production units and oilseed plantations shall be submitted? 25.03.2020

Agriculture producers and rose processors may submit to Regional Agriculture Offices in the country online [entry application form for the National Public Register](#) in compliance with terms and conditions pursuant to Art. 5 and Art. 22 of the Electronic Governance Act. The application may be submitted by using licensed post services.

You may find contact information on the websites of the Regional Agriculture Offices.

Farmers, who are not able to submit their documents by e-mail can visit the offices, in compliance with all the disinfection measures of the health authorities, For entry in the register under Art. 3 of the Oil Rose Act the rose producers, rose processors and owners of oil rose production units, shall submit in the regional offices a single model application at the permanent address of the individual, respectively at the registered office of the sole trader or legal entity. Farmers will have to comply with the schedules drawn up by each territorial office as well as with all the anti-epidemic measures provided in the country.

How can agricultural producers apply for financial support under State Aid Schemes? 20.03.2020.

Agricultural producers who wish to apply for financial support under State aid schemes can submit their applications by e-mail to the Regional Directorates of the State Fund Agriculture. These are part of the measures the institution imposes. For the convenience of farmers, templates of applications under State aid schemes are published on the SFA website. They are located in the main menu, in the State Aid category, in the submenu " Schemes under Regulation (EU) 702/2014 ":

- Application for Aid to compensate farmers' costs related to the implementation of measures under the National Program of Measures for the Control of Soil Pests on Potato Family Worms (Elateridae)-*template*
- Application for Aid to compensate farmers' costs related to the implementation of measures under the National Program of Measures for the Control of Tomato Leaf Miner - Tuta absoluta Meyrick (Lepidoptera) – *template*
- Application for Aid for certification of farms in the fruit and vegetables sector under the standard GLOBALG.A.P. – *template*

- Application for Aid for the co-financing of insurance premiums on agricultural production - *template*

Once the applications, together with the required documents, have been submitted by e-mail to the respective Regional Directorate, they will be processed. According to the schedule prepared, the agricultural producers will be informed when they should visit the Regional Directorate of the SFA to proceed with the final signing.

What will happen to the upcoming project acceptance under the RDP 2014-2020, MFP 2014-2020, NBP 2020-2022 and NSPV 2019-2023? 20.03.2020

Acceptance of project proposals under the Rural Development Program (RDP 2014-2020), the Maritime and Fisheries Program (MFP 2014-2020), the National Beekeeping Program (NBP 2020-2022) and the National Support Program in the Wine Sector (NPVS 2019-2023) will continue, as well as processing of applications submitted and making payments under the measures of the programs.

Will agrotechnical activities be restricted? 20.03.2020.

All spring treatments and activities that annually take place on the territory of the country, including sowing of spring plants - sunflower, corn, spring barley, nourishment and treatments with crop protection products for autumn crops are extremely important and need to be carried out in the appropriate agrotechnical terms. All agrotechnical events take place outdoors and do not suppose gathering many people in one place.

When carrying out technical instruction, preparation of machinery with the attached implements for spring activities, use of plant protection products and decontaminated seeds, in addition to the existing operational rules, workers should comply the Order issued by the Minister of Health for the implementation of anti-epidemic measures. Employers should make arrangements for the implementation of anti-epidemic measures, including filtering, disinfection and ventilation in the workplace, instructing personnel for hygiene requirements and preventing employees with acute infectious diseases from entering .

Will on-the-spot checks on farms be suspended? 20.03.2020

On-the-spot checks under the schemes and measures, administered by the SFA and MAF will continue to be carried out, thus ensuring the support of farmers. Upon their implementation, the requirements of the health authorities will be respected.

Will the programs for the prevention, surveillance and control of animal health be implemented? 20.03.2020

The control remains unchanged as an integral part of the unobstructed work and financing of the animal breeding farms. The BFSA experts carrying out official controls on animal health continue to make regular compliance checks. The implementation of all programs for the prevention, surveillance and control of animal health continues in order to ensure the safety of animal products. The implementation of urgent activities such as the elimination of outbreaks of animal diseases is guaranteed.

Set against the backdrop of COVID-19 outbreak in Europe and the world, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Veterinary Association (WVA) have identified specific veterinary activities critical to the prevention and management of diseases, including human-to-human transmission and ensuring food safety for the population:

- national and regional veterinary specialists and inspection services can control the integrity of public health;
- only healthy animals and their by-products are allowed in the food supply to ensure food safety for the population;
- successfully resolve the various cases of emergency and / or emergency situations;
- maintain the implementation of various precautionary measures, such as vaccination against diseases of major public health or economic impact;
- continue the priority research activities.

In carrying out their activities, veterinarians have a responsibility to protect their health and that of the people they work with, as well as the health of their patients. Therefore, they are obliged to ensure that biosecurity measures are implemented, that their personnel are protected with the necessary equipment and that farmers are informed of the precautionary measures applied.

What will happen to one-day employment contracts in the agriculture sector? 21.04.2020

As of April 21, 2020, registered agricultural producers and tobacco growers may electronically submit new template contracts for short-term seasonal agricultural work (under Article 114a of the Labor Code) for more than one day. For this purpose, the law has been modified under Art. 114a of the Labor Code pursuant to paragraph 49b of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Emergency Measures and Actions Act, announced by a Decision of the National Assembly of March 13, 2020 and Regulation No. RD01-250 / 13/04/2020 of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy.

Provisions of paragraph 49b of the Act regulate conclusion of the short-term contracts for seasonal agricultural work for more than one day - for 6 hours,

besides for 4 and 8 hours, as provided by the principle rule of the Labour Code, for the duration of the state of emergency. For the duration of the state of emergency registered tobacco growers can also benefit from this type of contract for the cultivation of crops and the harvesting of fruit vegetables, roses, lavender and tobacco. Registered farmers may obtain electronically generated samples of short-term employment contracts for seasonal agricultural work for one day having prepaid insurance contributions.

Registered farmers and tobacco producers, who use the Employment Contracts Portal under Art. 114a of the Labor Code for the first time, upon registration with a valid email at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, receive an automatic username and password to log in to the system. Those who do not have a valid email address should provide one in the Labor Inspectorate in order to provide access. The portal accesses provided so far remain valid.

You may find more information on the website of EA General Labor Inspectorate, - <http://www.gli.government.bg/page.php?c=82>

- <http://innovation.gli.government.bg/>.

EA General Labor Inspectorate reminds the registered agricultural producers and tobacco growers that they shall generate unique identity numbers for the new samples of short-term employment contracts used so far for seasonal agricultural work for one day until April 24, 2020.

What documents are necessary to the agricultural producers to cross the border checkpoint?25.03.2020

Agricultural producers who want to work on their fields, orchards, vineyards, greenhouses, agricultural lands, as well as livestock breeding farms, apiaries, aquaculture facilities, should in all cases be provided with access to carry out the necessary activities as sowing, spraying, soil cultivation, animal care.

For this purpose, agricultural producers shall be allowed to cross the checkpoints after:

Submission of a completed declaration (available on the MoI website):

<https://www.mvr.bg/press/%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%82%D1%83%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F/%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%82%D1%83%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F/%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%82%D1%83%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%BE/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B4/%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%82%D1%83%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%BE/%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0->

[%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7-%D0%BA%D0%BF%D0%BF-%D0%B2-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5](#)

As well as one of the following documents:

- Registration certificate under Regulation 3 as a farmer (green card). If not certified for 2020, the certificate is valid for 2019;
- Registration certificate for an animal breeding facility (farm, fishery or apiary);
- Service note issued by a farmer certifying that the person is his employee.

Vehicles transporting seeds, propagating material, fertilizers, preparations, veterinary medicinal products, feed, irrigation equipment, etc., necessary for carrying out agricultural, livestock breeding and fish farming activities are allowed to cross the checkpoints;

Farmers and livestock breeders will be allowed to visit the regional offices when documents are required to be submitted to the Agriculture Service Departments, Agriculture and Food Directorates, Food Safety Directorates or Food Safety Regional Directorates or to visit agro-pharmacies, veterinary facilities, spare parts machinery and equipment shops etc.

All citizens, employed in the Agriculture sector must comply with the requirements for a social distance of 1.5 to 2 meters when carrying out their activities.

The completed declarations will be collected by the Checkpoints' officials in order to control the implementation of the measures and to check the data in it.

What is the situation at border checkpoints? 20.03.2020,.. 25.03.2020

Transport companies can follow the updated information on border checkpoints conditions related to the imposed restrictions due the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Europe at the [following link](#).

The Council of Ministers has defined the border check points on Bulgarian territory through which unobstructed passage of commodities will be ensured.

The plan for securing "green corridors" along the European road network has been proposed by the Minister for Transport, Information Technology and Communications. It complies with the guidelines of the European Commission of 16 March 2020.

On the border with Greece the principal checkpoints designated are Kulata, Kapitan and Petko Voivoda, and Ilinden as backup. The principal checkpoints with Romania are the checkpoints at Vidin and Rouse, with Oryahovo and Silistra as backup.

Crossing points have also been identified with the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey, for which the European Union has also taken a coordinated approach. Kalotina is the designated border checkpoint between Bulgaria and Serbia, Kapitan Andreevo between Bulgaria and Turkey, and Gyueshevo – on the border with North Macedonia.

Crossing these "green corridor" points, including any checks and health checks on transport workers, should not exceed 15 minutes. "Green corridor" border crossings must be open to all goods vehicles carrying any type of goods.

Implementation of COVID-19 anti-epidemiological measures - guidance for business operators (26.03.2020):

http://www.babh.government.bg/bg/Page/ukazanie_kym_biznesoperatorite/index/ukazanie_kym_biznesoperatorite/COVID19%20%D0%A3%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BD

Amendments to the Law on Measures and Actions during the State of Emergency Relating to the Tax Insurance Requirements for the Period (01.04.2020.) :

Extension of deadline for filing annual tax returns under the Corporate Income Tax and Personal Income Tax Acts

1. For LEGAL ENTITIES acting as farmers and food producers:

- The deadline for filing corporate tax returns and annual activity reports, as well as for filing corporate tax, is extended to June 30, 2020., who acting as farmers and food producing companies:

- Farmers, legal entities and food producing companies owe contributions in advance on the basis of their estimated profit for 2020, taking into account the following net income thresholds (without change to the current regime):
 - BGN 300 000 – no advance contribution;
 - from BGN 300 000 to BGN 3 000 000– quarterly contributions;
 - above BGN 3 000 000 – monthly contributions
- Deadlines for making advance contributions for 2020 remain the same:

monthly:

- for the first quarter –until April 15, 2020;
- from April to December - to the date 15th of the month to which they refer
- 3-month period/quarterly:
 - for first quarter – April 15, 2020;
 - for second quarter – July 15, 2020;
 - for third quarter – December 15, 2020;
 - for fourth quarter – no advance contributions

considering the following features:

- If the annual tax return for 2019 was submitted before the Act came into force, advance installments will be made in the amount as declared, and if necessary, a declaration for changing the advance installments under Article 88 of Corporate Income Tax Act may be submitted under the general provisions of the law.
- In case the annual tax return for 2019 is filed after the Act enters into force and before 15 April 2020, the advance payments will be made in the amount as declared.
- Taxpayers who have not submitted the annual tax return for 2019 by 15 April 2020 are required to declare by that date the amount of the advance

instalments for 2020 by filing an annual tax return, but completed only in the part for the calculation of the advance payments for 2020.

2. For NATURAL PERSONALS - agricultural producers who carry on business within the meaning of the Commercial Act when they have chosen to be taxed as sole traders:

- The deadline for submission of the annual personal income tax return and for payment of the annual tax liability for sole merchants and the persons, who are not registered as traders but are taxed as sole merchants is extended to 30 June 2020.
- The persons who are entitled to use a 5% deduction from their outstanding tax liability, can utilize it if their tax return is filed and the tax is paid until 31 May 2020.
- Farmers owe advance contributions on the basis of their estimated profit for 2020, taking into account the following thresholds (without change to the current regime):

below BGN 300 000 – no advance payment;

- from BGN 300 000 to BGN 3 000 000 – quarterly payments;
- above BGN 3 000 000 – monthly payments;

- Deadlines for making advance payments for 2020 remain the same:

- monthly:

- for January, February, March and April - until April 30, 2020
- from May to December - to the date 15th of the month to which they refer

- 3-month period/quarterly:

- for first quarter - April 30, 2020;
- for second quarter - July 15, 2020;

- for third quarter - December 15, 2020;
- for fourth quarter – no advance payment,

considering the following features:

- - If the annual tax return for 2019 was submitted before the Act came into force, advance installments will be made in the amount as declared, and if necessary, a declaration for changing the advance installments under Article 88 of Corporate Income Tax Act may be submitted under the general provisions of the law.
- In case the annual tax return for 2019 is filed after the Act enters into force and before 15 April 2020, the advance payments will be made in the amount as declared.
- Taxpayers who have not submitted the annual tax return for 2019 by 15 April 2020 are required to declare by that date the amount of the advance instalments for 2020 by filing an annual tax return, but completed only in the part for the calculation of the advance payments for 2020.;

3. For NATURAL PERSONALS - agricultural producers, when they have chosen to be taxed a 60% deduction from their outstanding tax liability of legally recognizes expences for their activity, the current regime remains unchained:

- The deadline for submission of the annual personal income tax return by 30 April 2020

The deadline for submission of a 5% deduction annual personal tax return octava remains the same by 31 March 2020.

4. The Act provides for the possibility to sign the annual tax return for 2019 by means of an electronic signature .

5. The deadline for publication of the annual tan return for 2019 is extended to 30 September 2020 .

COVID-19 and farmed and domestic animals

Questions and Answers

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1. COVID-19 AND SARS-CoV-2

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) is the name given to the 2019 novel coronavirus.

COVID-19 is the name given to the disease in humans associated with the virus SARS-CoV-2.

2. RISK OF HUMAN INFECTION FROM ANIMALS

2.1. Is there a risk of COVID-19 infection from animals?

The main transmission route for SARS-CoV-2 is from person to person, mainly via respiratory droplets that infected people may emit via sneeze, cough, or exhale.

While available data, in particular genetic sequences, suggest that the SARS-CoV-2 virus emerged from an animal source, there is currently not enough evidence to identify precisely either the source or the route of transmission from the original animal reservoir to a putative intermediate host and then to humans. Studies are underway to better understand the susceptibility of different animal species to SARS-CoV-2 and to assess infection dynamics in susceptible animal species.

2.2. Is there a risk of transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus from humans to animals or between animals?

The environment of infected humans is likely to be contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 so animals that live in close contact with infected people are exposed to SARS-CoV-2.

The risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and infection in COVID-19 for pets living in affected households cannot be excluded. The preliminary assessment of this risk of exposure and subsequent infection in households is considered low for cats, ferrets and hamsters, very low for dogs and negligible for birds and reptiles (Shi et al., 2020¹).

There is no current evidence of dogs or cats playing a role in the spread of SARS-CoV-2 towards humans. In addition, despite isolated cases of infection reported in dogs and cats, currently there is no evidence to suggest that animals infected by humans are playing a significant role in the epidemiology of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Outbreaks of COVID-19 in humans are driven by person-to-person transmission. In previous episodes of SARS outbreaks, pets have not acted as animal reservoir or played a role in transmitting the virus through zoonotic transmission.

¹ Susceptibility of ferrets, cats, dogs, and other domesticated animals to SARS–coronavirus 2

Jianzhong Shi^{1,*}, Zhiyuan Wen^{1,*}, Gongxun Zhong^{1,*}, Huanliang Yang^{1,*}, Chong Wang^{1,*}, Baoying Huang^{2,*}, Renqiang Liu¹, Xijun He³, Lei Shuai¹, Ziruo Sun¹, Yubo Zhao¹, Peipei Liu², Libin Liang¹, Pengfei Cui¹, Jinliang Wang¹, Xianfeng Zhang³, Yuntao Guan³, Wenjie Tan², Guizhen Wu^{2,†}, Hualan Chen^{1,†}, Zhigao Bu^{1,3,†} ¹State Key Laboratory of Veterinary Biotechnology, Harbin Veterinary Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Harbin 150069, People’s Republic of China. ²National Institute for Viral Disease Control and Prevention, China CDC, Beijing 102206, People’s Republic of China. ³National High Containment Laboratory for Animal Diseases Control and Prevention, Harbin 150069, People’s Republic of China.

Minks have shown to be susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 and infection in farmed minks has been reported².

2.3. What are the clinical signs of the pets that were infected with SARS-CoV-2 in COVID-19 affected households?

Despite the fact that COVID-19 has recently emerged, there is already some scientific data indicating that SARS-CoV-2 has been detected in asymptomatic dogs owned by COVID-19 patients, that pet cats of COVID-19 patients tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 and experimental infection of cats and ferrets with SARS-COV-2 resulted in replication, shedding of the virus and spread to susceptible in-contact cats and ferrets.

The few reports available indicate that dogs from which the virus was detected had no clinical signs and infected cats suffered from transient respiratory and digestive disorders. Respiratory and digestive clinical signs and fever were also observed during experimental infections in ferrets and golden hamsters.

2.4. Should I take any special precaution with my pet?

First and foremost there is no justification for any measures to be taken which may in any way compromise the welfare of the animals in your care.

Despite there is no current evidence of dogs or cats or any other pet species playing a role in the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and that animals infected by humans are not playing a role in the epidemiology of COVID-19, a precautionary attitude and behaviour is recommended whenever possible. There are certain protective steps that can be taken:

- As a precaution, people infected with SARS-CoV-2 virus or suspected of being infected should avoid as much as possible close contact with their pet animals and should maintain good hygiene practices (e.g. isolating from pets, washing hands frequently, avoiding close face contact, wearing a facemask).
- Under the same precautionary approach, animals belonging to owners suspected of being infected with SARS-CoV-2 should minimise their contact with people or other animals and be kept confined indoors in their households or designated animal isolation places or shelters as much as practical, not jeopardising under any circumstances their welfare and for a duration equal to the lockdown recommendations for humans applicable in the same geographical area.
- Pet owners should keep their pets on a leash when walking outside to be able to keep the “social distance” with other people.

² <https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.23.2001005>

2.5. Is there a risk of infection with SARS-CoV-2 via pet food or animal feed? What about the packaging?

As for human food³, there has been no report of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 virus to animals via consumption of pet food. The European Food Safety Authority concluded that “there is no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus”⁴. Indeed, as for food for human consumption, there is no evidence and it appears very unlikely that you can become infected from handling pet food. The recommendations regarding the handling of pet food packages are the same as for the handling of any other package (for more details see Q&A on COVID-19 and Food Safety: hat is the risk of getting COVID-19 from food packaging?)⁵. This assessment is also valid for feed for farmed animals.

2.6. Is there any specific risk of infection with SARS-CoV-2 from food producing farm animals?

There is no evidence indicating that livestock can be infected with SARS-CoV-2. Furthermore, preliminary findings from studies suggest that poultry and pigs are not susceptible to SARS-CoV-2.

EU livestock production has the highest standards of food safety, animal health and welfare and environment protection, which hugely reduce the risk of transmission of pathogens. Indeed, high levels of biosecurity in farms limit considerably the potential exposure of farm animals to any zoonotic agent.

2.7. Is there any specific risk in fur animal farms or zoos?

Farmed mink have shown clinical signs and have been tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 in the Netherlands and Denmark. Most likely those animals have contracted the infection from their caretakers or farmers.. Further research is ongoing to get more insight in the epidemiology and further spread of SARS-CoV-2 in mink farms. Preliminary information from the Netherlands, based on the genomic sequencing of the virus, indicates that two employees in infected highly stocked mink farms have contracted SARS-CoV-2 from minks.

Data coming from laboratory experiments and from the field indicate that a number of animal species (cats, tigers, lions, ferrets, minks and to a much lesser extent dogs), are susceptible to infection with SARS-CoV-2. Data from

³ https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/biosafety_crisis_covid19_qandas_en.pdf

⁴ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/coronavirus-no-evidence-food-source-or-transmission-route>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/biosafety_crisis_covid19_qandas_en.pdf

field infections in animals shows that animals were infected by humans infected with the SARS-CoV-2 or suspected of having contracted COVID-19.

Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that animals infected by humans (like cats in several countries, minks or tigers in zoos in the USA) are playing any significant role in the spread of the virus. The main reason for outbreaks of COVID-19 in humans are driven by person-to-person transmission..

Based on the available information, there is no scientific evidence to justify the introduction of SARS-CoV-2 specific sanitary measures for animals..

However, as a precautionary measure, wearing appropriate personal protection equipment is recommended for fur animal farms and zoo employees who are considered to be in higher risk/vulnerable groups.

Further precautionary measures such as testing on mink farms, increased protection of workers in mink farms, prohibition of transit around the farms, restrictions of movements of minks, as well as culling of minks in infected premises should be rapidly implemented under specific local circumstances⁶.

3. ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND VETERINARY SERVICES

3.1. What can the European Commission and national veterinary services do with regards to the health of animals and the current COVID-19 pandemic?

Public health and veterinary services, including veterinary practitioners, work together in a One Health approach to share information, in particular about suspect or confirmation of infection in animals in order to conduct a risk assessment when a person with COVID-19 reports being or having been in contact with pets or other animals.

The EU supports a network of EU Reference Laboratories (EURLs) with the aim to ensure high-quality laboratory analysis and harmonised testing in the EU. That network supports the European Commission activities on risk assessment and risk management in several areas of laboratory analysis, including animal diseases.

In some countries, veterinary services and laboratories, as well as the aforementioned EURLs, are actively supporting core functions of the public health response, through effective contribution to the screening and testing of surveillance and diagnostic samples from humans.

The European Commission bases its actions and communications on the latest available scientific information and encourages promoting authoritative information sources, demoting content that is fact-checked as false or

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https://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Our_scientific_expertise/docs/pdf/COVID-19/Bruschke_update_SARS_CoV_3_infections_in_mink_Netherlands_9June2020.pdf

misleading, and taking down illegal content or content that could cause physical harm.⁷

3.2. What are the international responsibilities of the veterinary authorities in this event?

Veterinary authorities maintain close liaison with the European Commission and with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), as well as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). They ensure coherent and appropriate risk communication and risk management.

Appropriate data exchange systems are operational at the EU and international levels in order to inform rapidly the relevant competent veterinary authorities of the occurrence and evolution of animal diseases. These systems are important to monitor and update the situation and in case of need, to coordinate actions. Information emanating from these systems is also being shared with the public on the websites of the European Commission and the OIE⁸.

It is important that COVID-19 does not lead to the application of inappropriate control measures being taken against domestic or wild animals, which might unnecessarily compromise their welfare and health or have a negative impact on biodiversity and farm sustainability.

Veterinarians play a key role in risk communication, in particular in explaining the justification for risk management measures.

3.3. What is the EU approach to testing animals for SARS-CoV-2 infection?

Currently, there is no reason to justify any laboratory testing of pets or other domestic species for infection with SARS-CoV-2 therefore, no laboratory testing should be done outside appropriate scientific studies or surveys under the required controlled conditions.

Scientific studies intended to understand the potential reservoir and intermediate host animal species including pets, wildlife or farmed animal or the dynamics of COVID-19 as a possible zoonotic disease (human to animal and vice versa) are valuable. Testing on animals should be limited to scientific studies on SARS-CoV-2. Testing of sick animals could be exceptionally indicated if there is a COVID-19 confirmed patient or vulnerable people in the household, all other differential diagnosis having been exhausted with the Authorities finding reasons to initiate an investigation in those animals.

The EU encourages well-planned and thorough scientific investigations which will assist in gaining a better insight into the epidemiology of COVID-19. Veterinary services, private and official veterinarians, are encouraged to play an active role in the technical planning and coordination of the above

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation_en

⁸ <https://www.oie.int/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus>

described SARS-CoV-2 studies avoiding as much as possible duplication and the distraction of scarce resources towards less meaningful testing activities outside the research context.

4. MAIN INFORMATION SOURCES

Animal Health European Commission web page:

https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/health_en

World Organisation for Animal Health – Questions and answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

<https://www.oie.int/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>

FAO web page – Should we worry about animals?

<http://www.fao.org/2019-ncov/en/>

European Food Safety Authority

<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/coronavirus-no-evidence-food-source-or-transmission-route>

French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety

<https://www.anses.fr/en/content/covid-19-domestic-animals-play-no-part-transmission-virus-humans>

The Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut

<https://www.fli.de/en/press/press-releases/press-singleview/novel-coronavirus-sars-cov-2-fruit-bats-and-ferrets-are-susceptible-pigs-and-chickens-are-not/>

Sciensano

<https://www.sciensano.be/fr/sujets-sante/coronavirus>