

Dear Dr. Fritz,

April 8, 2020

I am writing to request your permission to test a cat patient of mine for SARS-CoV-2. Opie is a one-year old male neutered indoor only DSH that comes from a household where the owner became symptomatic and tested positive for COVID-19. Both Opie and his housemate Mickey, a 10-year-old DLH, are coughing. When the owner developed respiratory signs, he continued to kiss his cats and closely interact with them due to misinformation he read online that cats could not get SARS-CoV-2.

Opie had a normal examination by my colleague March 20th after 4-5 days of coughing. The owner declined radiographs and Opie was started on doxycycline. The cough did not improve, and the owner alerted us of his COVID-19 diagnosis. I reached out to Dr. Sinatra at Los Angeles Veterinary Public Health but testing protocols were not yet in place. I reached out to Idexx labs and exchanged e-mails with their COVID-19 task force. They would not say they would test for SARS-CoV-2 but I submitted a feline upper respiratory panel to them and was asked to label the request form "COVID19 Exposure" and e-mail them the requisition number. The upper respiratory PCR came back positive for Feline Calicivirus (FCV) and because of this they considered the matter closed.

Unfortunately, FCV infection does not explain the clinical presentation. I contacted my professor Dr. John Parker at Cornell to make sure I was not missing something. He is an FCV expert and he agreed that it would be highly unusual to have FCV without any upper respiratory signs. Very young kittens in shelter situations may occasionally have lower respiratory disease and pneumonia. Opie has been in the household since June of 2019 and was healthy for his examination at that time with no signs of infection since. Dr. Parker agrees that while the PCR result suggests Opie has FCV, given the history of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and a second housemate that developed a dry cough it seems worthwhile to proceed with further testing. We know that there are many asymptomatic healthy cats that test positive on PCR for calicivirus and I believe that the positive FCV test was incidental in this case.

Given what we know about people, cats and ferrets having homologous ACE2 receptors that SARS-CoV-2 uses to attach to cells and the history of exposure, I think it makes for a strong case to move forward with testing. If there is a negative result it is still useful information, despite being in a COVID-19 household infection from humans to pets seems rare and the public can feel less anxious about their pets. If the test is positive, it still appears to be rare but veterinarians and the media can continue to recommend to pet owners to practice good hygiene and physical distancing around their pets and reassure pet owners to discourage relinquishment.

If a Tiger in the Bronx Zoo who does not have access to the public was tested due to exposure from an asymptomatic zoo employee, I think Opie deserves testing given the confirmed positive owner. The results will help us gather more information on this novel virus and inform the millions of pet owners out there. If we look back at H1N1 similar assumptions were made, and eventually we realized cats could be infected and unfortunately many of the confirmed cats developed a fatal pneumonia. I please ask that

you request Idexx to test the pharyngeal swab samples they have in their possession or to have them forward the samples to the USDA for testing.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to reach out by e-mail or phone.

Respectfully,

Julio Lopez, DVM, DACVIM (SAIM)

Medical Director, The Veterinary Care Center

6455 Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90038

CVMA Delegate, Southern California

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Office: (310) 818-8888

E-mail JLopezDVM@gmail.com