# Guidance for Handlers of Service and Therapy Animals

Updated Mar. 18, 2021

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/animals/service-therapy-animals.html

## Summary of Recent Changes

## Updates as of March 2021

* Vaccination and prevention information was added for service animal handlers and their household members.

## Key Points

* People can spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to animals, especially during close contact.
* A small number of pet cats and dogs have been reported to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 in several countries, including the United States. Most of these pets became sick after contact with people with COVID-19.
* If you have a service or therapy animal, follow your local guidance for acceptable business and social practices. Consider local levels of COVID-19 transmission when evaluating the risk to yourself, your animal, and the people you might come into contact with.
* Follow CDC’s general recommendations for protecting pets from infection, when possible. For example, avoid unnecessary contact with people or other animals outside the household. Use your best judgment when taking an animal into a location where it could be exposed to COVID-19.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, service animals must be permitted to remain with their handlers.

## Ways to protect service animals

* Service animals may need to be around other people and animals while working. When possible, both the handler and the animal should stay at least 6 feet away from others.
* If a service animal is sick, call a veterinarian and do not go out in public with the animal.
* When possible, do not take a service animal into settings in which people might be infected with COVID-19 or facilities where you cannot prevent interactions with people who may have COVID-19.
* Avoid contact between sick people and the service animal as much as possible. If contact cannot be avoided, the sick person should wear a mask when around the animal.
* The animal handler and other household members should take steps to protect themselves, including getting a COVID-19 vaccine when it is available.
* Clean and disinfect service animal collars, vests, leashes or harnesses, and other supplies frequently.
* Do not wipe or bathe your service animal with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or other products, such as hand sanitizer, counter-cleaning wipes, or other industrial or surface cleaners. There is no evidence that the virus can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of companion animals. Talk to your veterinarian if you have questions about appropriate products for bathing or cleaning your animal.
* Do not put masks on service animals. Covering an animal’s face could harm them.

## Ways to protect therapy animals

Facilities that normally use therapy animals may not allow them at this time because people in many of these settings are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Follow local guidance and facility protocols for physical distancing, masks, and other ways to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. If therapy animals are invited to a facility or other setting, follow the steps below.

* Therapy animal visits require some level of contact between clients and the therapy animal team. When possible, keep animals at least 6 feet away from people and animals not participating in the visit. Handlers and participants should wear a mask during the visit.
* Do not take a therapy animal to visits if the animal is sick or has tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19.
* When deciding if it is safe to visit a household where someone has recently had COVID-19, refer to CDC guidance on [When You Can be Around Others After You Had or Likely Had COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html) at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html
* People with symptoms of COVID-19 should not touch, be close to, or interact with therapy animals. If someone was sick with COVID-19, they should wait until they recover to interact with therapy animals.
* Before and after every contact, the handler and anyone petting or having contact with the animal should wash their hands.
* Do not use items that multiple people handle, particularly if items are brought to multiple facilities between therapy visits (for example, leashes, harnesses, toys, or blankets). If items like leashes must be brought between facilities, disinfect them after each use or facility.
* Do not let other people handle items that go into the animal’s mouth, such as toys and treats.
* Disinfect items such as toys, collars, leashes, harnesses, therapy vests and scarves, and food/water bowls frequently.
* Do not allow therapy animals to lick or give ”kisses.”
* Do not wipe or bathe your therapy animal with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or other products, such as hand sanitizer, counter-cleaning wipes, or other industrial or surface cleaners. There is no evidence that the virus can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of companion animals.​ Talk to your veterinarian​ if you have questions about appropriate products for bathing or cleaning your animal​​.
* Do not put masks on therapy animals. Covering an animal’s face could harm the animal.

If you are a service or therapy animal handler, and **you get sick** with COVID-19 or have symptoms of COVID-19, follow recommendations for what to do if you get sick at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html and recommendations for protecting pets if you get sick at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/pets.html

If your **service or therapy animal gets sick** after contact with a person with COVID-19, call your veterinarian. If the animal tests positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, follow [recommendations for what to do if your pet tests positive](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/pets.html) at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/positive-pet.html

## Definitions

Service animals: Dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.

Therapy animals: A type of animal-assisted intervention. In this case, in a goal-directed intervention in which an animal meeting specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process.