

K-State veterinarian: No evidence that livestock can transmit COVID-19 to humans

Foods from farm animals also are considered safe from the virus

The director of a Kansas State University veterinary laboratory that responds to animal health issues across the state says that while coronavirus is a disease familiar to livestock producers, it is not the same strain of the virus that is grabbing headlines across the globe.

The novel strain of coronavirus, COVID-19, is transmitted through humans. There is no evidence that livestock can transmit the disease to humans, and the food products from livestock cannot carry COVID-19 to humans.

“Producers are well aware that there is a (different strain of) coronavirus that is associated with neo-natal diarrhea, and there’s another one that we think is now associated with cattle respiratory disease,” said Gregg Hanzlicek, director of the production animal field investigations unit in K-State’s Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

“But I want to make it perfectly clear that our cattle coronavirus has no relationship to the coronavirus that is currently circulating in humans. These coronaviruses are very species-specific. There is absolutely no indication that livestock can be carriers of COVID-19 and be a source of infection to humans, either through carrying it on their skin or their hair or anywhere else.”

He added: “Milk, eggs, beef pork...whatever proteins that are produced by livestock are absolutely safe to eat. People do not have to worry about those products carrying COVID-19 to the population.”

Hanzlicek said that producers are safe to go about the business of taking care of animals: “They need to minimize the amount of exposure they have to humans. At this point, they should keep on doing what they do every day with their livestock.”

Livestock producers who think they may have been exposed to COVID-19 should see their medical professional. If their livestock begin showing signs of illness, as well, Hanzlicek said they should contact their local veterinarian.

“The local vet will call the state or federal veterinarian and then a decision will be made whether to test those animals for COVID-19,” Hanzlicek said. “We don’t want to just start blanket sampling all animals. Again, with this virus, we do not believe that livestock are associated with spreading the disease.”

Hanzlicek said that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has relaxed its rules just a bit to allow producers to consult with a veterinarian through ‘tele-medicine’ – that is, communicating sickness to a veterinarian by phone or online technology.

“The veterinarian is not necessarily required to make a trip to actually look at the animals,” thus maintain ‘social distance’ guidelines for humans, Hanzlicek said.

The K-State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, which tests samples for suspected livestock disease, remains open during the university’s limited operations status. Hanzlicek said the lab is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday.

Hanzlicek and others also are still available to travel throughout Kansas to help local veterinarians diagnose suspected livestock disease. The staff can be contacted by calling 785-532-5650, or through its web site, www.ksvdl.org.

Hanzlicek said the [FDA also maintains a useful site](#) with information for livestock owners regarding COVID-19.

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