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Research on SARS-CoV-2 - confirmation in a second cat in the Canton of Zurich

Dear Dr Eloit,

The Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) would like to inform the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) of the confirmation of SARS-CoV-2 in another domestic cat in the Canton of Zurich.

On the 27th of December 2020, the six year old female European Shorthair cat was presented to a private veterinary clinic with severe dyspnoea and hypothermia and died with suspected septicaemia. The owner of the cat had tested positive for COVID-19 on the 26th of December 2020. Therefore, samples of the cat were analysed in the frame of a research project, investigating the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infections in pet animals from COVID-19 positive households. The project is in the responsibility of the Clinical Laboratory of the Vetsuisse Faculty (VSF) of the University of Zurich (UZH).

The cat was submitted to the Institute of Veterinary Pathology of the VSF, UZH, for diagnostic post mortem examination.

Nasal and oropharyngeal swab samples collected post mortem were analysed by means of RT-qPCR for SARS-CoV-2 viral RNA. The samples tested positive for the E and RdRP genes (CT 30-32). The molecular results were confirmed by the Institute of Virology and Immunology (IVI, Mittelhäusern, Switzerland). The molecular analysis for feline calicivirus (FCV) and feline herpesvirus (FHV) yielded negative results.

The results of the post mortem examination indicate that the cat suffered from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. In addition and unrelated to the cardiac condition, it had developed a severe acute desquamative to focally fibrinosuppurative pneumonia with hydrothorax that can be considered as the cause of death. SARS-CoV-2 E and RdRp RNA was detected at low level in the lung (CT 34 and 42), but without clear SARS-CoV-2 antigen expression, as determined by immunohistology.

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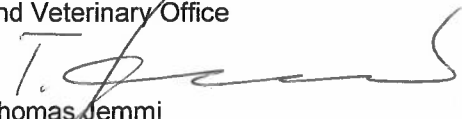


Further investigations into the cause of the pneumonia and the potential contribution of SARS-CoV-2 are ongoing.

The second cat in the household tested negative for SARS-CoV-2.

The Swiss government does currently not recommend to test cats for SARS-CoV-2 but supports research to increase knowledge in the field. For the time being, COVID-19 continues to be treated as a human disease with the main route of transmission between human beings.

Federal Food Safety
and Veterinary Office



Thomas Jemmi
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