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Caring for exotic animals amid COVID-19 pandemic

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NEW YORK(AP) – The tiger that tested positive for the new coronavirus is the “first well-documented example of a person infecting an animal and an animal getting sick”, said Dr. Paul Calle of the Bronx Zoo in New York.

Calle told the Associated Press on Monday that the zoo’s 4-year-old Malayan tiger named Nadia — and six other tigers and lions that had also fallen ill — are believed to have been infected by a zoo employee who wasn’t yet showing symptoms.

The first animal started showing symptoms March 27, and all are doing well and expected to recover. The zoo has been closed to the public since March 16 amid the surging coronavirus outbreak in New York.

The finding raises new questions about transmission of the virus in animals.

Bobbi Brink, Vice President of Lions Tigers & Bears, talked to Good Morning San Diego on how they are caring for exotic animals during the pandemic.

There have been a handful of reports outside the U.S. of pet dogs or cats becoming infected after close contact with contagious people, including a Hong Kong dog that tested positive for a low level of the pathogen in February and early March. Hong Kong agriculture authorities concluded that pet dogs and cats couldn't pass the virus to human beings but could test positive if exposed by their owners.

Some researchers have been trying to understand the susceptibility of different animal species to the virus, and to determine how it spreads among animals, according to the Paris-based World Organization for Animal Health.

The American Veterinary Medical Association and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been recommending that out of an abundance of caution, people ill with the coronavirus should limit contact with animals — advice that the veterinary group reiterated after learning of the tiger's test result.

In general, the CDC also advises people to wash their hands after handling animals and do other things to keep pets and their homes clean.