



AS IT IS

Hong Kong Orders Hamsters Killed After COVID-19 Infections

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Hong Kong ordered a mass killing of hamsters on Tuesday after discovering some of the animals were infected with COVID-19.

The order came after a worker at a **pet** store that was selling hamsters also tested **positive**.

Hong Kong's government planned to kill about 2,000 small animals, including hamsters, in an effort to prevent virus spread. Officials said the killings would be carried out in a humane way. The city also banned the sale of hamsters and the import of small animals.

The pet shop employee tested positive for the Delta **variant** of COVID-19 on Monday, The Associated Press reported. Several hamsters that were being sold at the store also tested positive. The animals had been imported from the Netherlands.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has stated that animals do not appear to play a major part in spreading COVID-19. But Hong Kong officials say they are not ruling out the possibility that COVID-19 might have spread from animals.

“We cannot **exclude** the possibility that the shopkeeper was in fact actually infected from the hamsters,” said Edwin Tsui. He is a controller at Hong Kong's Center for Health Protection.

Hong Kong has also tested rabbits and chinchillas, but so far only hamsters have tested positive.

Officials advised citizens who own hamsters to keep them at home and to wash their hands after touching the animals. The officials also warned animal owners not to kiss their pets.

People who bought hamsters from the store after January 7 will be contacted by the government. They will be asked to hand over their hamsters and may also have to go into **quarantine** themselves.

Hong Kong's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said it was “shocked and concerned” by the decision to kill the animals. It urged the government not to take “any **drastic** action” before examining other possible choices.

After three months without any local virus spread, Hong Kong has started seeing new COVID-19 cases in humans over the past few weeks. As a result, thousands of people have been sent to government-run quarantine centers. Most of the new infections have been the fast-spreading Omicron version of the virus. The cases linked to the pet shop worker, however, were linked to the Delta variant.

I'm Bryan Lynn.

The Associated Press and Reuters reported on this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the reports for VOA Learning English.

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Words in This Story

pet – *n.* an animal that someone keeps in their home

positive – *adj.* in a medical test, positive means the person being tested has a disease or condition

variant – *n.* something that takes a slightly different form from the usual one

exclude – *v.* to not permit someone or something to take part in an activity or enter a place

quarantine – *n.* the period of time during which a person or animal that has a disease or that might have a disease is kept away from others to prevent the disease from spreading

drastic – *adj.* sudden or extreme
